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THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY.

VOL. II.

THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY.

BY

MARY CECIL HAY,

AUTHOR OF

"OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY,"

"VICTOR AND VANQUISHED,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER I.

“**A**UNT MICHAL, we must give a dinner-party.”

If the three birch-trees on the height had fallen at once with a crash, Miss Windish could not have started back in greater alarm.

“Scot, what do you mean? Oh! my dear, what *do* you mean?”

“That we had better give a dinner-party,” repeated Scot, unabashed.

He had just come in from his last visit round the farm, on the night after Colonel Egerton's call, and, as his greeting had roused Miss Michal from her surreptitious postprandial “winks,” it had taken her at a double disadvantage.

"You never knew, I'm sure, at Kingswood, what was the expense of a dinner-party," she moaned.

"But ours will not be a Kingswood dinner-party."

Miss Michal answered this remark only by a heavy sigh. Her least hopeless idea was that a dinner-party here could be only an utterly ruinous failure. She sat rocking herself dolefully to and fro in the very front of the wood fire; and her eyes glittered and blinked as if two sparks had found their way in.

"I might have expected this," she said at last; "I've expected something to happen ever since you brought those snowdrops in, the first day we came. It is always unlucky to a house when the master or mistress carries in the first snowdrops.

"And our party is to be the ill-luck? Well, considering all things, Aunt Michal, I don't think the Fates are coming down upon us very hard about those snowdrops. Now let us talk it over."

Talk it over! This was bringing the reality home with a terrible definiteness. Of course, if Scot thought it worth while to talk it over, he

meant to do it; and he seemed just as comfortable as if it were easier to provide a dinner which would escape the censure of twelve critical souls, who had nothing to do but censure, than to supply the daily dual meal of mackerel and mutton, to which hunger was so generous a sauce. A dinner-party, to Miss Michal, meant an unending perspective of the most expensive dainties in the world; the most extravagant wines and most unattainable fruits, with unlimited decorations, and inexplicable culinary mysteries. And here was she dependent on the fish Scot caught, the mutton Liath killed, the poultry Elizabeth always spoiled in the plucking, and the sweets her own awkward and inexperienced fingers manufactured; while, as for wine and fruits—she had serious thoughts of bringing the whole contents of the cellar and the apple-room before Scot this instant, practically to convince him of the absurdity of his project.

“Let’s have a look at the account-books,” he said, searching among the papers and pamphlets on a side-table. “We had better see our way clearly, hadn’t we, Aunt Michal?”

“I don’t care to see my way clearly to extravagance and ruin,” returned Miss Michal,

with an acceleration of energy in the rocking.

“Don’t you? Now I think it is the best way of all to see clearly, because then one can avoid it. Now, Aunt Michal, how do we stand?” he added, opening her neat little book on the table, and bending over it. “Here’s *October 24*—all right, that’s to-day—*soap, one shilling and fourpence*. Oh, that doesn’t balance us up to-day! Where shall I find a sort of epitome, where we can see our prospects by a *coup-d’œil*? Is this it, on the opposite sheet? *Eggs sold to the Vicarage, two shillings*. Aunt Michal!”

Miss Windish looked up, really terrified by something in Scot’s tone; not its suppressed anger—behind her barricade of tears Miss Michal was impervious to any fire of anger—but the shock of a keen humiliation.

“It’s absurd of you, Scot, my dear,” she said, with an almost pathetic blending of sympathy for him and deprecation for herself, “to fancy it derogatory in us to—to sell what we have too much of. We ought to do it; we’re only farmers, and all farmers are expected to do it, and we want the money; and I hope next

Summer we shall have lots of things to sell ; chickens, and butter, and hams, and—oh, Scot !”

But by the time the little lady's breathless speech had broken down entirely, Scot had lost that look which had so shocked her.

“You are right, Aunt Michal,” he said, quietly, as he closed and put aside the account-book ; “we must earn what is possible, and even then I doubt whether we shall keep the wolf from the door for long. I had no right to startle you. But, though of course I sell what I can on the farm, I had never before imagined that *you* would have to suffer these mortifications.”

“Mortifications ! I am never more pleased than when I pocket my own earnings—for the poultry is mine, you know, Scot. One penny a week a head Liath says I must allow for their keep, besides the scraps from the house ; so there was a clear profit of two shillings and ninepence on the couple I sold yesterday. I've calculated that that's five days' wages for Elizabeth and a halfpenny over.”

Scot's laugh was very good to hear, after that pause of distress a few minutes before.

"But won't there be a sale somewhere presently, Aunt Michal?"

"I fear not," sighed Miss Michal; "I don't see one advertised, and I always look carefully. But what about that dinner-party, Scot? Do think it well over before you decide upon it. Remember, the guests would be those who used to go to Kingswood, where there was everything which could satisfy the most fastidious. And, far better and more important still," added poor Miss Michal, overwhelmed at the thought, "servants who understood all about it, and made the success of the whole thing sure."

But the lugubrious regrets and anticipations were alike unavailing, for with pleasant, good-humoured determination, Scot turned aside, or overcame, all the obstacles she erected. Creditably she went through the various stages of depression, but, when the culminating point of decision was reached, and the day fixed, she had apparently no intention of subsiding into a limp nonentity, so braced herself for the coming struggle.

Fortunately, just then Elizabeth brought in the tea-tray, and Miss Michal found speedy consolation in imbibing two cups of her favourite

beverage. She had the tray on a little table on the hearth-rug, between herself and Scot; but he had begun to write so busily that, in spite of her incessant reminders, he did not turn to take his tea until, as she told him, it was as cold as charity.

"Then it's about the warmest and pleasantest thing on earth," said Scot, still engrossed in his writing. "I shall be ready in one moment, Aunt Michal; this is the last. I've only invited the Egertons, and the Chamberlains, and the Leveys, except Colonel Graham and two of the other officers—Gresford, of course, because he's such a friend of Violet Levey's, and Major Porter. That will do, won't it, with our Vicar and his wife?"

"Do!" repeated Miss Michal. "That will be twelve without ourselves—I mean if Steven Chamberlain comes; and he is sure to come at your invitation. Just look at the size of these rooms!"

"But my looking won't make them any larger, Aunt Michal."

"And the shabbiness of this chintz!"

"Be cheered by the old riddle. The chairs and couches will all be *satin* that night."

"If I could get a lot of damask at a sale!" put in Miss Michal, in a tone of such deep solicitude that it was no wonder Scot laughed.

"Do drink your tea," fretted Miss Michal, as he folded his last letter; "or else—yes, I thought so!" she added, in a tone of brisk conviction, when Liath entered to summon his master.

Left alone, she recommenced her slow, deliberate rocking, and moaned to herself for company. That he should have to go at all hours of the evening to see about the animals and grain, just at the summons of an old farm-labourer, while she recalled the time when his own quiet and deferential servants had never dared to disturb him! And that he should have to manage and economise over this dinner-party, when, by only an act of his own will, he would have been able to entertain Colonel Egerton and his friends in such royal style, and without one thought to the labour, or difficulty, or expense! It was no wonder that she looked more pensive even than usual when Scot came in again.

After this, time seemed to speed with giant

strides for Miss Windish until the day of the dinner-party came. Scot had enlisted efficient aid, for Sutton and his wife, the butler and housekeeper from Kingswood, had taken the White Lion at Minton, and there was nothing which Mr. Monkton could have proposed to them that they would not eagerly have done for him. They drove out to the Black Birches that morning in their comfortable gig, and took quietly upon themselves every item of preparation; the experienced butler politely setting aside Liath's willing but awkward help, and his wife chatting a good deal to hide the fact that she totally neglected Miss Windish's advice or proffered assistance.

When Scot came home late in the afternoon, Miss Michal gave vent to the direst of her dire complaints.

"Oh, Scot, I'm not a bit of use! Mrs. Sutton has done everything in the kitchen, and Sutton has laid the table and prepared the rooms; and—I'm no good!"

"You are a great deal of good to me, Aunt Michal," said Scot, promptly and kindly. "Do you think I should ever have thought of giving a party if the labour had to fall upon you? You

are hostess, you know. Who could take that onerous post from you?"

"It's kind of you to say so, of course," mourned the little lady, with a gentle application of her handkerchief to her eyes, "but I'm not necessary for anything—and—only a burden! Oh, Scot," she added, with her characteristic change of tone, "just think of the Suttons bringing over the silver your father gave them for their wedding present! It was so lucky——"

The flush on young Monkton's face stopped her. Even *she* was learning now to detect these stabs which he found it so hard to bear and to hide.

"My dear Scot," she said, in haste, "it is all very nice, and your things are put ready for you. Sutton said you shouldn't miss Artaud just for this one night. See how well everything looks. Wasn't it lucky everyone accepted, because it makes it all so equal—six on each side, and we two at the head and foot. As Liath said just now, when he peeped in, it is real 'cemetery.' Now I'm going to dress."

Scot took out his watch with a smile.

"'Four hours—and who could do it in less?—by haughty Coelia spent in dressing!' Aunt

Michal,"—a little pause, while he put back his watch, and glanced down the table—"how shall you pair your guests?"

"My dear," said Miss Michal, with an unexpected show of mild dignity, "if you have any wishes on the subject, or suggestions to offer, pray offer them; otherwise——"

"I only thought," remarked Scot, with great carelessness, "that you had better give Violet Levey to Captain Gresford; and—let Steven Chamberlain take Miss Egerton."

"Then Mr. Levey will be mad," put in Miss Windish, briskly. "Ever since the Egertons have been here, it has been plain to see that he has been infatuated. Don't you think I had better——"

"As you like, Aunt Michal, but I should have thought you would care more for Steven than for Levey."

And whether because she really did, or whether it was because she cared more for Scot than either, certain it is that Doris was sent into the dining-room on the arm of the gentleman with the gentle eyes and the long fair beard, about whom she had questioned Kenneth on her first Sunday at Kingswood Church.

Two or three times Miss Michal's eyes fastened themselves in astonishment on the pair, as if it were unusual to see Steven Chamberlain conversing; yet there were times when she could have felt no astonishment, because he was gravely and profoundly silent. These were the intervals when Doris, in a little spirit of womanly pique, shut herself within herself, and decided that she would not, all through the meal, be the first to start a subject of discussion, and prove the merriest in small talk. Then arose again her more natural and generous impulses, and Steven's grey, dreamy eyes brightened, and he talked well and quietly—very well, thought Doris, and remarkably quietly; only that he had a trick of ending his sentences abruptly, as if he had intended to make them longer, but had suddenly changed his mind.

Margaret Chamberlain, sitting nearly opposite to Doris, took what seemed to more than one of the party an inexplicable interest in the *tête-à-tête*.

"She is jealous of her brother," thought her next neighbour, Bernard Levey, his own feelings colouring the thought. "I shall not trouble myself to entertain her any more."

"She is sick of her own companion," thought the Vicar's wife; "he has taken no pains to amuse or interest her; yet how anxious he has hitherto been to ingratiate himself with her and Steven, as with everybody whom he knew to be of high birth!"

But, when Doris once caught the look of pleasure and gentle interest on Margaret's face, her own suddenly clouded, and the cold expression so out of place upon it, held its momentary sway. Margaret Chamberlain dropped her eyes upon her plate, and only two others at the table noticed it. Rose Levey glanced swiftly from one to the other, feeling that Margaret Chamberlain could not mind the conceit of a girl at least ten years younger than herself, unless she had some motive in seeking her good-will; and their host could not help a brief glance of annoyance before he addressed Margaret.

After all, the dinner—much to Miss Michal's astonishment—passed over without a hitch or hindrance; and she owned to herself that, even without the rarities and luxuries of Kingswood, Sutton could insure the perfection of a meal; and even here, in these small, ugly rooms, Scot was so easy and so perfect a host that no one

felt as if anything was missing. Strange to say, it was this very thought which made poor little Miss Michal's eyes so moist when she timidly rose to pilot the ladies. "It is so hard and unnatural," she whispered in her thoughts, with the quietest little gasp in her breath, "to think of his having only such a place as *this* ever again to call his home; and he to look so happy here!"—by which it would appear that, in Miss Michal's blinking eyes, this was a great aggravation of the offence.

Half a day of Sutton's devotion had made the drawing-room so convenient and so bright that Miss Windish, for at least ten minutes after her re-entrance, was lost in admiration of the changes in the prim bestowal of the furniture, and at the lights, so cleverly arranged to show off the best at its best, and keep the worst in the shade; while she nodded irrelevantly in answer to the remarks of Doris, who had come up to share her little couch, and who went on chatting gaily and gently, in spite of the irrelevancy of the answering observations.

So it had gone on through ten minutes, and Sutton had left them each provided with a cup of coffee—unexcelled, as he was fully aware,

even at Kingswood—when Margaret Chamberlain came quietly across from her seat at the window, and, taking possession of an ottoman near Doris, spoke to her with a perfectly perceptible hesitation in her low voice.

“Are you beginning to feel at home now at Kingswood, Miss Egerton?”

Doris raised her cup, and sipped her coffee coolly while Margaret spoke, and then her lips were chill as if it had been ice they had imbibed.

“It is home, Miss Chamberlain. It has been home to me from the first day I came.”

“And you like it?”

“Like it? Yes”—with a cold abruptness,—
“I like it.”

“Of course Colonel Egerton does, or he would not have returned here.”

“Indeed he would not have returned, if he had not liked the house and the country.”

There was nothing in the words themselves; yet what Doris had meant her companion to feel she evidently felt, for her face was far graver than its wont when Doris, resigning her seat, even passed away to join another group, so quietly that no one could possibly guess she did it in

avoidance of Miss Chamberlain—no one, that is, save Margaret Chamberlain herself.

Violet Levey, with a vacant seat beside her, turned away from a lary conversation with the wife of the Vicar of Kingswood, to motion Doris to an adjacent seat.

“I think,” Mrs. Herries was saying, in her quiet, sensible way, “that you have no need, Miss Levey, to expend so great an amount of pity upon Mr. Monkton. The rare power of making the best of everything, and taking the worst so pleasantly, does not make him a man to be pitied—pray do not think so.”

“But,” said Violet, in her languid, determined tones, “he must suffer so very much.”

“How acutely those strong, sensitive temperaments *do* suffer, we most of us can never even guess,” returned Mrs. Herries, in a manner which betrayed her desire to change the subject. And then Violet turned to Doris, and conversed on various small topics, until the gentlemen sauntered in—for do not gentlemen feel it their bounden duty to saunter, whether anxious or indifferent about the assembled feminine throng?

The vacant seat beside Violet Levey was taken in a leisurely manner by Captain Gres-

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ford, for whom possibly it had been reserved, though Violet's eyes had been lifted rather eagerly when her host had passed within reach of it. But not so carelessly could Scot pass her sister. She looked up with a smile, and addressed him so pointedly that he took the empty seat, and answered her nonsense with gayer and greater nonsense.

"I had no idea, Mr. Monkton," she said, presently, when the nonsense was exhausted; "how pretty this house really was inside. This is a charming room."

"To-night," assented Scot, courteously: "but its charms are not native."

Rose, with a smile, looked down upon her gorgeous tunic of white bugles, which, as she had anticipated, was causing a great astonishment to-night; and the large white fingers rested there with all their jewels flashing. But Scot's eyes left these attractions without overpowering regret, and wandered to the farther window, near which sat Margaret Chamberlain, with a book in her hand, a strange stillness in her attitude, and an unusual sombreness in her dress of mourning net—It was twelve years at least since Margaret had taken her father away

from Comely Place, and returned alone, after seeking in vain for health for him ; but not even yet had she left off the mourning dress. How curious it was that, without the cause being definable, there should be in her whole appearance and manner such a strange sad air of isolation ; “while others ”—perhaps it was only a chance which led Scot’s eyes just then to where Doris, in her long, soft dress of palest blue, with no ornament in the sunny twist of hair, walked quietly across the room from her seat beside Violet Levey, and spoke to Mr. Chamberlain, who sat looking absently among the flowers near him.—“While others,” mused Scot, finishing his thought, as he watched her speak to him with that bright girlish ease which was earnest as well as piquant, “seem as if isolation would be impossible to them, and ”—when Steven turned brightly from his long, thoughtful gaze—“and prevent isolation being even possible in their presence.”

“It seems to me, Mr. Monkton,” observed Miss Levey, perhaps following his intent and rather amused gaze, “that Miss Egerton feels she has discovered a kindred spirit in that shy, eccentric Mr. Chamberlain. Think of her going

up to him in that way, and sitting down and chatting as if they had known each other for years! There must be some affinity between them—mustn't there?"

"Certainly," assented Scot, though without returning Miss Levey's smile. "There is always an affinity between noble and romantic natures."

"Mr. Monkton," said Rose, her smile growing broader, "what an excellent one you are at a joke! You do it so gravely. But really I don't see why Miss Egerton should not be a nice girl, in spite of her unformed manners—schoolgirlish let us say, for I don't know why we need accuse her of anything else. Girls do get that flippant, self-satisfied manner at a boarding-school, I'm sorry to say; and no doubt Miss Egerton will lose it as she gains knowledge of the world. Conceit is so very ugly—isn't it, Mr. Monkton?"

"Don't our old poets talk with pride of a 'pretty conceit?'"

"Do they?" Miss Levey asked, innocently. "I should never have guessed it. I think it is such a very unpleasant quality. It is as bad to be conceited as to be a flirt; though perhaps of

one who could so falsely read the thoughts of another. "You are too bad. As for me, I really think her pretty; putting her behaviour out of the question, I will maintain that there is something pretty in her face. Violet says I am prejudiced in her favour, for she cannot get any others to own that they see a grain of prettiness in her; and Bernard considers that the deficiency of character in her face is so very striking."

"Your brother is a good judge," remarked Scot, in his leisurely way, "and the opinion from him is high praise, for it is evident *he objects* to character in a face."

Rose's fingers impatiently toyed with the bugles. How could she be expected to carry on this conversation sensibly, while she was in the dark as to her companion's real reception of her remarks? For instance, did he mean, by that last speech, that of course he saw Bernard's unequivocal admiration for the face without character? And did he really think——? But no; it was impossible to tell what he *did* think. Would he never—even here, where he really was poor and almost insignificant, and where many people as rich as she might have

been inclined to look down upon him—lose his polite, but always thoroughly independent coolness?

“Of course, if young Mr. Bradford were here to-night,” resumed Miss Levey, presently, with a renewed lightness of tone, “Miss Egerton would be more decorous and grave, and would not make such a point of engrossing Mr. Chamberlain. In his absence I can forgive her, and I hope you do also. It is scarcely *her* fault if she has not studied deeper things. I daresay, after her marriage, it will be different. It is to take place very soon, for all the final arrangements were made during Mr. Bradford’s last visit at the Dower House. You heard this, Mr. Monkton?”

“Did I? I really forget; but you are sure to be right.”

“Mr. Kenneth Bradford is the son of your solicitor, is he not?”

“He is the son of an old and valued friend of mine, as well as of my father, Miss Levey; and a most uncommon fellow—a dreamer and a poet; generous and tender-hearted.”

“Then Miss Egerton ought to be very happy in her married life.”

"I should say there is not a shadow of doubt about it."

"And I really hope, Mr. Monkton, that you can feel as confident of Mr. Bradford's happiness."

"As for that," returned Scot, solemnly, rising as he spoke, "of course he chose with his eyes open, and he must take the consequences. Will you not play to us, Miss Levey?"

As Rose never played anything but the accompaniments to a certain set of glees in which her brother and sister were strong, and for which there were generally further recruits available, this was a signal for the concerted music to begin. Captain Gresford willingly appropriated the bass parts, and sang them *fortissimo*, with his eyebrows very high, and his chin resting on his tie. Bernard Levey warbled the tenor, placidly and correctly, satisfying himself, and apparently satisfying his audience, for no one could have told exactly what they missed. Mrs. Herries came pleasantly forward when requested, and made a clear and pleasant alto; while Violet Levey, throwing her head back with every high note, and feeling her way up to it, effectually robbed each air of its

pathos and its beauty, and, to the letter, performed the usual office of an inartistic soprano, by piercing her way through the other parts, and leaving them nowhere.

"I can forgive her pride to me when I see how pleasant she has been with Steven."

It was almost as if Margaret Chamberlain thought the words only, so quietly and naturally she said them to Scot, while he sat beside her, and Violet Levey's voice, pirouetting upwards, alighted in safety upon an F sharp—very sharp—of surprising power.

"It is quite peculiarly kind and thoughtful, her manner to Steven— isn't it?" Margaret went on. "It quite makes up to me."

Perhaps Scot wondered why it should "make up" to her for any coldness from a younger girl, but if he did he said no word of this.

The vocalists finished their request to each other to "Come, fairies, trip it," and, starting off on a new tack, cried in shrill and rousing tones, "Oh, hush thee, my baby!" The two Colonels—probably with a pleasant conviction of not being particularly addressed—fell into a cheerful and irrelevant dialogue, which ended in cribbage. The Vicar, conscious of being,

through his wife, connected with the glee, listened as devoutly as if he had been the baby in question; one ear pointed to the ceiling, and his spoon going smoothly and noiselessly round and round in his cup; while his yearning eyes rested upon Miss Michal, who was feebly holding forth to Major Porter on a subject in which the good Vicar's soul delighted—the new athletic and cricket clubs at Minton. Doris Egerton still sat near the flower-stand with Steven Chamberlain, sipping her tea, and between the pauses of listening chatting on in her gay, gentle way, while first one and then another joined them for a minute, and while Scot, from his low chair near Margaret, looked on and wondered. He had seen, more than once that evening, how she had repulsed Miss Chamberlain's gentle overtures of friendship, and yet here was this pleasant sociability with one who did so little himself to stimulate it, and who was, after all, so nearly connected with Margaret. Such conduct was so comical in Scot's eyes, that he had hard work even to prevent a laugh.

The energetic lullaby was over now, and the performers dispersed in a shower of remarks

which burst forth as if the final chord had been the fall of a barricade, behind which the impeded conversation had been growing in bulk and volume during its temporary imprisonment. Mr. Bernard Levey, without a moment's hesitation, came up to Doris, and comfortably established himself near her. Probably Monkton would presently be prevailed upon to play, and if so, Bernard would lose the temporary advantage the glees had given him. But in the meantime, what other man in the room could have contributed such a tenor? Presently he would (if pressed) show them the true musical rendering and real poetic fervour of "Her bright smile haunts me still;" and then what would it signify even if Monkton *did* play?

What would it signify? The very framing of the thought betrayed Bernard's weak point. It was mortifying indeed; for, in spite of his immaculate toilet and his clear cadenzas, in spite of his white hands and regular features, he had not even to-night reached that point which he had deemed it would be so easy to reach here and now—that point of conscious superiority over the young man who, as heir of Kingswood, had for him possessed unconscious-

ly such an unpleasantly rasping power. No; Bernard's dreams, after to-night, must be confessed as doubly futile. Even here, in this pettifogging farm, hard-worked most probably, and certainly poor, there was still something in Scot Monkton which Mr. Levey could not reach. Yet surreptitiously he was trying now—as indefatigably as he had ever tried—to imitate it.

“I cannot understand it,” he mused to himself, in the pauses of his energetic claim to Miss Egerton's attention. “It must be something in the blue blood.”

“You play, of course, Miss Egerton? Any one with a glance into your face can see that you are musical.”

“A glance into my face would leave a wide field for conjecture,” laughed Doris—not at all in the tone she had used to Mr. Chamberlain.

“A very bright and beautiful field,” ventured Bernard, his smile as broad, and his admiration as undisguised as his compliment. Then he paused.

Though he felt so serenely confident that he would have little difficulty in winning Doris when he chose to display all his powers, he

knew it was not even now too soon to put forth the tender shoots, and after that flowery speech a little silence would be telling. In this silence Mr. Levey anxiously watched the effect of his words, at the same time wishing he were a greater adept in the art of looking at ease, whether he felt so or not—an art in which he was keenly and jealously aware that Scot Monkton always excelled him, though he could be, by no means, keenly aware of the fact that Scot's power lay in the total absence of any thought at all about it.

But in this silence came a heavy blow to young Levey. Before the smile had died on Doris Egerton's lips, after her companion's novel compliment, and even before her wondering eyes had quite turned away from her companion's face, Scot Monkton had—as Bernard expressed it to himself, in his chagrin—obtruded himself where he was not needed, and taken Doris off to the piano.

She played a *Lied* of Mendelssohn's with a wide, sweet spirit in the touch and interpretation; while Violet Levey whispered to Captain Gresford, with a smile, that it made her sleepy; and while little Miss Michal leaned her head

upon her hand, and wondered why it was harder now to talk about the cricket club, although the room was so much quieter; and while Scot stood back a little from the instrument, letting Rose Levey wait in vain to meet his eyes.

It was only the Vicar's wife who came forward when Doris paused, and asked her to sing to them; but the girl answered in that manner which is gentlest and pleasantest of all—by a prompt acquiescence. She sang Liszt's wonderful music to that beautiful night-song of Goethe's, "*Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruhe.*" The almost unearthly calm, both of words and setting, held her listeners entranced, and the marvellous beauty of the modulation at the close was sad and dreamy, as all real sweetness and perfection is.

"Thank you—beautiful—thank you!"

The words were uttered by several voices in a buzz, when Doris let her hands fall in her lap; but she knew there were two or three who had not joined that chorus of thanks and praise. She turned and looked up at Scot.

"Did you like it?" she asked, simply.

A smile broke in a moment over his dreaming face, and he came forward—alert in the present, as it was ever in his nature to be.

It was not until some time afterwards—when Violet Levey, after begging in vain to accompany Mr. Monkton, had been prevailed upon to accompany her brother instead—that for the first time Scot lingered voluntarily beside Doris, where he could speak to her without his words being intended for half a dozen other pairs of ears; and yet, though it was such a gentle, anxious speech, it was the one, of all others, which she could most easily resent.

“I have been so sorry not to see you join Miss Chamberlain at all. I had hoped you would be friends.”

“I don’t like her,” said Doris, tersely.

“She is——”

“But I quite agree with Mr. Levey,” she interrupted, smiling; “her hair is very neat.”

“How cruel you girls can be to each other,” said Scot, betraying his unfeigned astonishment; “yet, Miss Egerton, how plainly you read the spirit of the music of a man who could love widely and as a brother!”

“You don’t understand, Mr. Monkton,” re-

turned the girl, with an amusing air of dignity.

"I shall never *choose* to like Miss Chamberlain, or to say she is clever, or nice, or handsome."

"As for being clever," said Scot, coolly, "she has learned a far wider knowledge than most girls can ever dream of; and, as for her being nice, it simply depends upon your power of appreciation; while, as for her being handsome, I should like to see the face for which beauty alone can do what goodness does for hers."

But, kindly and warmly as he spoke, he had had no wish to bring that wistful look into his young guest's eyes; so he changed his tone for the next question.

"Don't you wish that Miss Chamberlain had written a book?"

"Why?"

"I don't know; only I remember Job says, 'Oh that mine adversary had written a book!' as if it would be a grand thing; but perhaps Job was a reviewer in those days."

"I don't think Job meant anything unkind," said Doris, with an unpleasant conviction that her enmity stood paraded before her in despicable colours and proportions at that moment. "I always thought he meant the reverse."

He"—with a burst of honesty—"was very different from me."

"Very," assented Scot, with great composure.

"I know you think me contemptible," Doris went on, with pretty childlike earnestness; "but, if you had a sister, Mr. Monkton, she would understand, I think."

Some one called him just then, and Doris's big blue eyes grew grave almost to sadness, and refused to brighten again, even when Mr. Levey renewed his blandishments, and when laughter and music and conversation were holding uninterrupted sway.

The evening had worn to its margin, and Mrs. Herries was meditating a whisper with her husband as to the advisability of ordering their little phaeton, when Rose Levey, in a spirit of unexpected friendliness, slipped her hand through Doris Egerton's arm, and drew her from Bernard's compliments and Major Porter's jokes.

"It is very inconvenient to have only one room to sit in," she whispered, leading Doris towards the door; "but the hall is utilised for to-night. Come and see how pleasant it is there."

"It is pleasant in the drawing-room too," said Doris, always loyal to the absent. "I think it most pleasant everywhere."

"Oh, yes, yes—of course," assented Rose, in a nervous, pre-occupied manner; "but I like to walk here a little—don't you? It is so cool and so fresh, and yet not cold, and—did you notice when Miss Chamberlain left the room?"

"No; did she leave it?" questioned Doris, without any interest.

"Yes, in a most extraordinary manner. We will stand a minute, if you like; but don't draw that curtain yet; there is a glass door leading out into the garden behind the house. Yes, she left the room five minutes ago, for no cause whatever. It is some secret plan of her own, for attracting Mr. Monkton. I came out here presently, and we heard voices—Vi and Captain Gresford were here too—and I drew back this curtain, and saw her and Mr. Monkton strolling away together. You may well start, Miss Egerton. I dropped the curtain again in a moment, because of the lights in here; but I knew they hadn't seen me. They"—Rose's voice sank to a whisper here—"are down at the gate now, talking still. I've been upstairs to look out

from a dark window in the lobby—come.”

“No, thank you,” said Doris, drawing back, proudly, but quite gently; “I do not like the dark.”

“Oh, nonsense!” cried Rose, too much excited to be amused by the evidently feigned excuse, and reading nothing of the shame that Doris felt in being conscious that her own conduct to Margaret Chamberlain had encouraged this confidence. “You ought to see, because everybody ought to be warned against treachery in friends.”

Of course it would have been easy for Doris to say, with truth, that Margaret Chamberlain was no friend of hers; but, uttered just then, and in answer to Rose Levey's speech, the reply would have been too mean to be framed by the girl's lips, even if it could have been conceived in her heart.

“Let us go in again,” she said, shivering, though her hands were soft and warm, and a faint, bright glow was on her cheeks.

“No, let us run upstairs for a moment,” pleaded Rose, energetically. “I want you just to see how sly girls can be.”

“I will take the fact on trust, please,” smiled

Doris. And—though she could suspect nothing of that conversation Rose had had with Scot about herself, in which lurked a fuller lesson on the question of how sly girls can be—she steadfastly set her face against following Rose upstairs.

* * * * *

Though in reality not many minutes, it seemed to Doris that an interminable time passed after she had returned to the party before her father rose and asked her, with a smile, if she was ready.

The carriage had arrived from the Dower House to fetch them, so Doris turned to say good-bye to Miss Michal ; and just at that minute Scot re-entered the room, his manner quite perceptibly hurried, for all his native coolness.

“I am so sorry you are hastening away,” he said, taking the long crimson cloak from Sutton, and opening it for Doris ; “I had hoped to hear you sing once more.”

She glanced up into his face. Could he think she did not see that his thoughts were far off, and would not follow the words ?

“That’s the wrong side, Mr. Monkton, please.”

It was with a pleasant smile she spoke, but he had no smile.

“You had promised my aunt to sing one or two old favourites of hers—do you forget? She was so pleased, because she never hears her own songs. Is it quite too late to ask you?”

“‘I cannot,’” she said, standing still in the long cloak Scot was buttoning.

“‘—sing the old songs now.

It is not that I deem them low;

’Tis that I can’t remember how

They go.’”

He, stooping at his task, looked up now with a smile in his warm eyes; and Doris glanced down to meet it. She had read a good many novels, so she knew that people who are deceitful ought to betray the fact always by their eyes; and, just as she was wondering whether it was because she was not in a novel that she could not read the fact in his, he went forward with swift cordiality to greet—Kenneth.

Had she ever before in all her life turned to Kenneth with such longing and such gladness?

“I prefer strolling up the Larch Walk with

my cigar," said Colonel Egerton, buttoning his overcoat; "I shall be at home as early as you young ones."

So they drove away together, leaving the group that had gathered in the hall in old-fashioned courtesy.

"I wish I had been with you," Kenneth said, as Doris told him of the party; "Mr. Monkton said he wished it too. What a host he makes, Doris, even there!"

"I liked Mr. Chamberlain, Kenneth," she said, evidently wishing him to talk, yet wilful in the matter of subjects.

"But he wasn't there—I noticed particularly."

"He was," asserted Doris, decisively; and then she added, a little less decisively—"he could not have left when you came."

"Doris, how pretty you look!"

"Do I?" she asked, but absently, for she was striving hard, but in vain, to recollect whether Steven could have left the party to seek his sister.

"Mr. Monkton has such a way of——"

"Did you notice Miss Levey's dress, Ken?"

But even this abrupt question did not show

Kenneth that Doris would rather talk of *any-one* than Scot. He had something far more important to speak of than Miss Levey's dress, and in a few minutes he was in the midst of his eager anticipations, now grown so large and so gorgeous.

Very quietly Doris listened, her hand in his, and her words bright, although so very few that, when they melted into silence, the change was hardly noticeable.

* * * * *

Only one window at the old farm had any light behind it when Doris turned away from her long, long watch at her own window—turned away with a new, faint, sad experience at her heart.

* * * * *

"What a nice gentlemanly young fellow that Mr. Bradford is, Scot!"

Miss Michal stood warming her toes before retiring, and, when she hurled this harmless conversational shaft, she was looking pensively down into the coals, with the crown of her little black lace cap turned to Scot, as he sat straight before the fire in her own low arm-chair.

"I think it such an excellent thing for Miss Egerton that her future is settled—don't you, my dear? Neither she nor her father has any anxiety about it now; and when two young people grow up betrothed, it saves so much doubt, and disappointment, and heart-burning. Colonel Egerton told me they had been as good as engaged ever since they were children; and of course, if so, Mr. Bradford has been able quite to form her mind to suit him. What a nice arrangement!—isn't it, Scot?"

"I heard of such another once," said Scot, lazily, "or read of it—I forget which. The man was an author, and a character—Day his name was; of course you, like everybody else, have heard of him. He longed for a wife whose sympathies and tastes should be exactly his own, and so he educated a child on purpose. He tried the experiment most conscientiously—fool's experiment as it was."

"Well?"

"I forget all the particulars, but in the end the girl married his friend."

"Well," observed Miss Michal, very placidly, "after all, it might have been a comfortable ending. If she found she couldn't love him,

she saved him from a great deal of unpleasantness by acting in time—don't you think so?"

No answer. Miss Michal changed the foot on the fender, and made a metaphorical step nearer bed by taking out her brooch.

"What do you think yourself, Scot?" she asked; the question a mere part of her resting idleness.

"Nothing—except that the friend who stepped in between them must have been a rascal."

CHAPTER II.

KENNETH had come down to Kingswood, in his father's stead, to transact a certain matter of business with Mr. Monkton; and so after breakfast next morning he prepared to walk to the Black Birches.

"Must I wait, Doris, darling," he asked, as she rose from her seat, "until housekeeping affairs are off your mind?"

"I am not coming Ken."

"Oh yes, you will, love! It is a rare November morning, and I shall wait for you."

"The walk will do you good, Doris?" put in her father, wondering at her hesitation; "and Kenneth will enjoy it more with you than alone, though he is a poet, and ought to be solitary. Go with him, darling, as far as the bridge, at any rate."

So Doris ran off on her visit to the house-

keeper's room, and in five minutes appeared at Kenneth's side in the porch, her eyes bright and blue under a white felt hat of limp and uncertain tendencies, and her fingers planting a bunch of auriculas in the button-hole of her jacket.

"Dissipation never hurts you, Doris," said Kenneth, as he looked into her face. "I suppose last night you came home and fell asleep peacefully (as a good and happy child should), and in the morning here are the sweet blush roses, and your eyes undimmed."

"Indeed, Ken," she said, her mouth puckered solemnly as she gazed up into his worn face, "I slept very badly last night; at least, I mean I hardly slept at all. Of course, you see, we all of us must expect to have, like Enoch Arden, our dark hour unseen. But I don't think of it, now I have you, Ken."

"And how can I ever think regretfully of my own looks when I have you, my darling?" he cried, never guessing that it had cost her anything to cheer him by that bright little proof of sympathy which had been wrung from her by the praise that had unconsciously borne so much pathos.

Before they had reached the end of the Larch Walk, the jaded look had melted from Kenneth's face. How could it live in this double sunshine? Though even the larch leaves now were falling, still through the almost leafless boughs the Winter sunshine fell; and, far above, a skylark sang, in triumph, just the song which one little greenfinch, on a tiny twig, was patiently and humbly practising, with a cheery confidence that to do its best was as much as ought to be expected from any little songster—feathered or otherwise.

But for Kenneth, sweet as were the rest and beauty of the Autumn morning, there was a fuller sunshine in his darling's sweet, warm, tender ways. Through all the happy hours and days that he remembered so well, had she ever been so kind as she was now? How her eyes flashed and her cheeks glowed as he told her of the nearness of his great hope, and the advance in his great poem! How her breath quickened and her eyes filled as he repeated to her its most passionate thoughts and graceful imagery! And then how her cheeks paled and her lips quivered when he told her how unceasingly he worked at it through every hour

he could spare, both from the day and night, in that quiet room of his into which he so often, in his weary moments, tried to bring her fancied presence.

"Doris," he said, his heart very full, "the sweetest thought I have is that you will share the fame which I am working so hard to win."

"But, Ken," she cried, with just one moment's eager hope darting across the fear—which was even yet so vague—that this pursuit was wearing him, "it is *you* I love. No fame would make you dearer to me than you are at this moment. I—oh, Ken, don't look so glad, please! My love is such a little gift. It breaks my heart to see your gratitude for it."

"Such a little gift!"

He only repeated the words dreamily as he paused upon the bridge, but it might well have frightened her to see the rapturous joy upon his face.

"I shall wait here for you, Ken. I like waiting, so promise me not to hasten."

"I promise indeed," he said, in his quiet, conscientious way; "for this is business of my father's. I hope my thoughts will not hover

here with you, my darling. You are sure you will not come on to the house?"

"Quite sure."

"But isn't it supposed to be the correct thing to call after a dinner-party? There's an irresistible argument! You must do your duty in society, my dear."

"Papa will call, and, if he bids me, I will go," said Doris, with a chill in her voice, as she sat down upon the low grey wall.

"Look! There's Miss Windish feeding her fowls—can you see? Surely you will come and have a chat with her?"

"No," said Doris, sturdily, though her eyes were almost longing in their pleasant gaze at the unconscious little black figure dispensing limited provision among the feathered epicures.

"And you did not bring a book, did you?"

"No; I shall sit and think."

"Stay—I have in my pocket one I brought for my journey; I will leave it, because, if you have a book, you can read or think, as you like; but, if you have no book, you have no choice. Good-bye, my darling."

"Good-bye, Ken. You promise you won't let Mr. Monkton think you are in a hurry?"

“Indeed I do; I would not for the world. He has never been impatient with me when pleasanter things have awaited him; and, besides that, I would not for my father’s sake.”

Until he was quite out of sight, Doris’s eyes followed him, that she might be ready with a recognition whenever he turned; but when he could no longer see her, she left the bridge, and went and sat beside the river, on the exposed and knotted root of an old pollard. The book was still in her hands, but, without opening it, she sat and gazed down upon the river, until at last she broke, forcibly and impatiently, the long thought which held her, and took up her book, as if to find a refuge in its pages. But she could not have read many lines when she laid her hands upon the leaves, and again let her eyes and her thoughts wander, not to be brought back again until the crushing and the scattering of fallen leaves told her of footsteps behind. They came up to her together, Kenneth and Mr. Monkton; and when they had greeted her, and while they stood before her, laughing at her snug position, she fixed her gaze upon Kenneth’s face steadily—as if she thought it safer there. Then Scot comfortably settled

himself upon the grass, with as much gravity and deliberation as if he felt he had to spend the day there.

"Will that do?" asked Kenneth, with a laugh, when at last he had finished the process. But Doris too was watching now, just as critically as if it might have been a little bit of clever acting.

"In poetry," she said, her gravity equal to his own, "men always 'throw' themselves upon the grass."

"In poetry," returned Scot, lazily, "there's always plenty of grass at hand, of the softest and richest."

Far away the wood-pigeons coo'd their plaintive questioning note, and Scot sat listening. His velveteen was dusty, and a good deal worn, and the great deerhound was allowed to lay his nose upon it where he would. Yet—yet what a true gentleman he was, and——Doris finished the thought only by a smile, as she turned her eyes from the handsome sunburnt face. And it happened to be just at that moment that Mr. Monkton so quizzically broke the silence.

"Of what are you thinking so busily, Miss Egerton?"

"Only," she said, quite readily and quietly, "of a few words I read while I was alone."

"Please to read them to us,"

"They were not worth thinking of," said Doris, with a laugh, "and you ought not to have *asked* me of what I was thinking—but this is it—'The real gentleman should be gentle in everything—at least, in everything that depends on himself.'"

"An idea of Hare's," put in Kenneth, seeing nothing of Doris's brave effort to read calmly under Scot Monkton's intent and quizzical gaze.

"What does the worthy old man mean, Miss Egerton? Does he inform us how to discern a gentleman?"

"Yes."

"Then please read on; we are anxious to know about ourselves."

"'He ought, therefore,'" read Doris, quite at her ease again now, "'to be mild'—that won't do for you, Mr. Monkton; 'and calm'—nor that, for you are excitable; 'even'—and you are very odd; 'temperate'—and you are——"

"Given over to alcohol?" questioned Scot, in her dubious pause. "Is that what you were

going to say, Miss Egerton ? It is very delightful and refreshing. Anything more ?”

“ ‘Many such gentlemen are to be found,’ ” concluded Doris, calmly, before she closed the book.

“I am glad Mr. Hare thinks so. And that’s what you’ve been studying, is it ?”

“No ; I only read it just before you came up.”

“And thought it over *after* we came up ?”

Guessing nothing of the real thought which had applied the words to him, of course he had not expected the bright blush which came rushing into her cheeks. Seeing it, he turned aside, and, folding his arms as he leaned his back to the tree, looked across at the farm.

“I would not think, if I were you, Miss Egerton. ‘Thinking is but an idle waste of thought, and naught is everything, and everything is naught.’ I call that the very finest logic.”

“Then you see, Doris, you ought to have read industriously all the time I was away,” laughed Kenneth.

“Unless,” continued Scot, “Miss Egerton agrees with me and the Greek proverb, that a great book is a great evil ; and, necessarily, a lesser book is only a lesser evil.”

"I think that is Mr. Levey's opinion," smiled Doris; "but I do not think it is yours in earnest, Mr. Monkton."

"For happiness I would as soon depend on bubbles as on books," remarked Scot, coolly.

"On what can any of us *depend*?" asked Kenneth, seriously.

There was a pause among them, which Doris broke, in that fresh yet thoughtful manner which was not only natural to her, fostered by the love which had been around her from her childhood, but was also deepened by the fact of her never having had any very intimate girl-companions, yet always having been the first and dearest to one who was so thoughtful and so dreamy himself.

"May I tell you?" she said shyly; and then she quoted Burns' lines, her young bright tones giving them a new beauty, if not a new meaning—

"It's no in books, it's no in lear,
To make us truly blest;
If happiness has not her seat and centre in the breast,
We may be wise, or rich, or great,
But never can be blest."

"I see," said Scot, in his tranquil way; "nei-

ther books nor lear—I don't go much with lear myself, because I don't know him, and he may be any monster—can do it; but then you've left us stranded there. Happiness is to have her seat and centre in the breast, but who is to hand her in, and be surety for her behaviour in the matter of staying there?"

"We ourselves," answered Kenneth, gravely.

"But it's all such a mere matter of opinion," persisted Scot, in his leisurely tones. "For instance, Bradford, look at that flower in your button-hole—you call it heartsease, but there are people of our own island who would raise their eyebrows at your ignorance, because they call it mother-in-law. Now, you see, one man would think he was all right because he had heartsease in his breast, while another would be angry because he had mother-in-law there."

"Is that," asked Kenneth, presently, pointing across the river, "the young horse of which Doris told me?"

"Yes; I am going to try him this afternoon."

"Do you care to ride only the horses you have trained for yourself, Mr. Monkton?" asked Doris.

"I am not going to train Vaulter for myself;

Major Porter bought him from me on condition that I broke him."

"But I quite thought you had intended this one for yourself."

"So I had," said Scot, with apparent unconcern, "but Major Porter offered to buy it, and I could not afford to refuse."

"Is he still unsafe to ride?" asked Doris, with a new and added anxiety.

"No."

"Then, Mr. Monkton, I wish you would ride with me—once."

So shyly and so humbly she asked it—thinking only of the pathos of that little speech of his which had betrayed his wish to keep the horse—that Kenneth looked at her in surprise. Would not anyone be proud and pleased to ride with her, not once, but one hundred times? Yet Scot did not even seem to read the evident wish; he only questioned her as to what rides she had already taken.

"Oh, I haven't half explored this neighbourhood yet," she said, her smile bright and pleasant as ever, for she could not blame him for not understanding her, and she knew how little leisure he would be likely to have for taking

aimless, unattractive rides. "Next time I ride, I'm going along what they call the River Road, beyond Patten. I have never been there. Is it pretty, Mr. Monkton?"

"I have not ridden there for months. It is not a very wide or smooth road, and the river runs more than a hundred feet below it. For several miles it lies between—indeed, one may say it *hangs* between—a rocky slope, which is almost like a wall, and the sheer precipice down to the water. I don't think you will care to ride there very often."

"But I like anything new; and, besides, I ought to know all the roads about my own home. Mr. Monkton," added Doris, gently, as she rose, "will you come home with us? Papa will be so glad if you come and lunch with us."

Without any hesitation, or future promise, he declined; and yet again Doris—though so sensitive—could see or feel nothing that was not kind and pleasant, as well as polite.

She gave him her hand to say "Good-bye," and just at that moment they all saw a gentleman sauntering along the water's edge, looking down upon the ground, and so wrapt in thought

that he had come quite among them before he either saw or heard them. When he raised his head swiftly at their greeting, Doris seemed very pleased to waive all ceremony, and introduced Kenneth there and then to Mr. Chamberlain; and Scot caught himself watching her very intently, both while she did so, and when she afterwards talked so brightly and so naturally with Steven. But Mr. Chamberlain had evidently no time to spare this morning, even though his step had been so slow. It was quite apparent to them all that he tried to hasten away, though each thought that was but natural, as he must have seen that they had been separating when he reached them.

"But stay, Steven," said Scot, as Mr. Chamberlain moved on. "I'm going your way; so why should we not walk together?"

"A prior engagement, you see, Doris," observed Kenneth, when they two had turned into the Larch Walk; "they are going direct to Comely Place. For my own part, darling, I am more pleased to have you to myself; the hours seem flying from me. Why so silent, Doris?"

"Ken," she whispered, very low and earnest-

ly, "I wish—oh, I do so wish—you didn't love me so well! I do so wish it!"

"But I don't," he said, with a ring of perfect gladness in his quiet tones. "I am a happy fellow so, my love, and could not be happy otherwise; besides, even if I were not, I could not help it now, for my love is far too strong and steadfast, and rooted far too deeply, to be moved now, even at your bidding, my darling. Doris, do you not know what a blessing your love is to me?"

"It is because of that," she whispered.

"Then, darling, if you love me, you will never say it again—if you love me, I say! I never could utter that word, were there even the faintest shadow of doubt."

"If I love you!" she echoed, softly. "You never doubt it, Kenneth, do you? Never—never?" She repeated the word in deepest thought, laying her right hand solemnly in his. "No; you and I are promised, and we will both be true till death."

CHAPTER III.

WHETHER or not Scot had had, as Kenneth said, a prior engagement at Comely Place, certain it is that there had been simply time for him to walk to the house and back, when he re-entered the farm garden, to find Miss Michal hard at work there, in a poke bonnet, and with an old shawl folded across her breast, and tied in a knot behind. With the assistance of her spectacles, she was peering into the frames, pinching off the shoots, and removing the dead or dying leaves of her plants.

“Oh, you’re come at last, Scot!” she said, rising and clapping her leather gloves together to get rid of the loose soil. “I daresay the cutlets are scorched to cinders. I would not have luncheon carried in while he was there. I remember when I first saw him at Kingswood,

I shuddered just as I always do when a person walks over my grave, and *I* will not be the one to encourage him here. When you've quite done with him, Scot, call me in ; and, if everything's spoiled, of course it will be a great pity and a great waste."

Before this cheerful speech was ended, Miss Michal had resumed her work with greater energy.

"*Who is he!*" she echoed, excitedly, when Scot asked that not unnatural question. "Who is he? Why, the Frenchman, to be sure—a wicked, vulgar, idle, ugly creature!" With each adjective Miss Michal raised her querulous tones, as if each expressed a much higher degree of horror. "And, if I had my own way, Scot—which of course I should never think of having or deserving—I should forbid him the house. Not"—depositing a pot in the frame with a feeble bang—"that he would have minded that, I'm quite sure, and would have come just as impertinently as ever ; but it would have been some little satisfaction to say it."

"I will try," said Scot, with a laugh, as he walked on to the house.

"It's of no use," mourned Miss Michal, looking after him with a flower-pot in her hands, and a small tear in each eye; "courage is no match for craft on *this* earth." Then, with a lugubrious sigh, and without staying to demonstrate on what earth courage would have the advantage, she deposited the pot in the frame, and began the planting of the Spring bulbs in a narrow border, beyond which lay an unruly strawberry kingdom.

"Mr. Monkton," said Philippe Sourdhet, when Scot had taken his seat beside the fire, opposite to the one in which the Frenchman was seated, "I have called upon you to-day on a little matter of business—a trifle, merely a trifle—but I felt that a personal interview would be more satisfactory than a message. Some six months ago," he continued, having both looked and waited in vain for a reply, "you purchased from Mr. Wessel, of Minton, machinery and implements to the value of sixty guineas. You follow me, Mr. Monkton," he added, after having again paused in vain for an answering remark.

"I follow you certainly, so far," said Scot, impatiently; "hasten, please."

"I have now called for the amount, Mr. Monkton."

"You !" exclaimed Scot, with rather amused disdain. "Are you then settled in this darkened neighbourhood as a humane collector of debts ?"

"I collect my own," replied the Frenchman, with a smile, "and I, sometime ago, bought Wessel's business."

"I see," said Scot, with a drollery even in his haughtiness ; "you have especially bought this debt of mine, and Wessel is wise to make what he can out of a failing business, and to go abroad, now that most of his dupes have their eyes open. He has sold me a good deal of useless machinery, and I told him so. One engine I returned to him."

"But very naturally," rejoined Monsieur Sourdret, with a smile, "Wessel returned it again to you, with a reminder that you had bought it, and that it was your own fault if you could not sufficiently understand it to avail yourself of its advantages ; he sent an experienced man over to show it at work."

"Yes, and the man himself could not manage it. Anyone can see that the machinery is de-

fective. What more have you to say, Monsieur Sourdets ?”

“That, as his affairs are being wound up, I must demand the amount of your bill at once.”

“I shall never pay a farthing for what I cannot use.”

“Wessel’s man will swear that the engine was sent out perfect.” Sourdets made the rejoinder roughly, in a new tone, but evidently without intention, for he ended it abruptly, and with a smile ; “I hope, Mr. Monkton, that you can advance no objection to my becoming your creditor instead of Wessel.”

“None at all. The matter looks only a shade more fraudulent than it did before.”

“You are simply my debtor now, instead of Wessel’s ; and I, you see, am able to remind you of a prompt and efficient remedy. Think the matter over, Mr. Monkton. There awaits you an income which makes these debts sink into the most utter insignificance ; a princely, magnificent income, lying now idle and useless, just because you will not give your solicitor instructions to purchase certain documents from me, for a sum which, as he himself will

tell you, is a mere mite. You could not hesitate if you really thought it over for one hour; and then you would laugh at ever having for a moment paused, and let yourself be bothered by debts which could be comfortably paid out of a single day's income at Kingswood, but which here must ruin you. Why not take willingly now, Mr. Monkton, what presently you will be *obliged* to take? The laugh will be against you when you take it then—a ruined man; the laugh cannot be against you now. Don't be hasty with me; I am speaking for your good. I cannot stay long in this neighbourhood, and I should be sorry to feel you would regret all your life—a life spent here—that you did not listen to me in time. Even if you are still so romantic—a romance which would be laughable, sir, even in a child—as to be willing to stay here and slip gradually down to penury, still why not take your own property *unwillingly*? The willingness will soon assert itself when you are at Kingswood again. Once make the first step, and you will have no sickly fancies. Act from the motive of the apothecary in that love-sick English play of yours. You have the will to keep up the

Quixotic eccentricity, but your poverty robs you of the power."

"Fortunately I have the power as well as the will to guard my own honour," said Scot, coolly; "and, beyond that, Monsieur Sourdét, I have another power and another will. Had you not better leave this house before I exercise them?"

"You will be sorry presently," observed Philippe Sourdét, his teeth all exposed under his heavy black moustache, and his eyes, in their glitter, seeming almost to meet over his nose.

"I am sorry now," said Scot, haughtily, "because this debt has given you an excuse for coming here."

"I will say no more to-day," returned Sourdét, with an effort at plausibility. "You will soon think differently, and I will hasten here at your summons."

"You will wait for the summons, if you please."

Philippe Sourdét gave one long vindictive glance into his companion's face—such a handsome, debonair face, even in its scorn—and the sight made Monsieur Sourdét wroth beyond all

words, in his baffled avarice ; yet still he smiled and bowed with his parting words.

“I am willing to wait for this debt, Mr. Monkton, and you give me no thanks. Yet Mr. Wessel told me that you expressed a frank obligation to him, when—knowing it was but natural that you would be hard up at first—he promised you your own time.”

“I cannot prevent your insulting whomsoever you choose to insult,” said Scot, rising swiftly in his passion, while the veins grew high on his forehead ; “but, by heaven, you don’t insult me twice in my own house !”

Yet still again the Frenchman, as he left the room, bowed and smiled ; reminding Mr. Monkton that he would be at his service a few days longer.

“Now,” ejaculated Miss Windish, setting down her watering-pot on the gravel, as Scot sauntered down the garden-path ; “now you will have the kindness to take your luncheon, Scot, and forget the worries of that mean, huge creature with the soiled complexion. What did he come to harass you about to-day ?”

“Wessel has emigrated, and he is collecting his debts.”

"Then he came for money?"

"Has he ever come for anything else?"

"Scot, my dear," whispered Miss Michal, anxiously, "didn't Wessel come over here himself about the implements and things, and *beg* you to buy, and say he would wait as long as you chose for payment, because he knew the farm could not yield when you first went into it? I remember how I thought he bothered you a great deal, but that you told me you felt very much obliged. And now he has turned out a sneak—I thought he would."

"It's all right," said Scot, dryly.

" 'To John I owed great obligation ;
But John unhappily thought fit
To publish it to all the nation—
Now John and I are fairly quit.' "

It's a pleasant sensation, Aunt Michal, to cry quits with any man."

"Oh, dear, dear!" sighed Miss Michal, slipping her hand through Scot's arm, forgetful of the condition of her gardening gauntlet. "I know you mean a great deal more than you say, and something terrible will come of that man's interference. I always knew there would—I knew it from the first."

Scot made no answer, but his thoughts were not with Monsieur Sourdets, as his aunt fancied. He was only wondering whether her suspicions had really always been as easily and generally roused as she herself afterwards fancied.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE weeks had passed since Scot's dinner-party, yet something had always occurred to delay that solitary ride which Doris Egerton had planned to take along the River Road,

Colonel Egerton had made a wide circle of acquaintance during his previous residence at Kingswood; and, besides that, he kept open house—as an old soldier would—for the officers stationed in Minton; so Doris soon found, by experience, that it would not do to reckon her time her own, and depend upon any plan for a solitary excursion. Miss Bradford had come down to visit them now, and, so far, Doris had not cared to leave her aunt. Then Kenneth was often appearing unexpectedly, and he did not care to ride; and never did Doris now pro-

pose anything which she was not quite sure he would enjoy.

Kenneth was working harder than ever now, in that quiet room of his between the Strand and the Thames; and Doris saw the traces on his face of much close work and restless thought. If it had been possible, her manner would have had an added gentleness and kindness; but it was not possible, unless it had been another manner than Doris's own. Not once did Kenneth look in vain for the bright piquancy of old, or the debonair gaiety. Not once did he listen in vain for the prompt, unreasoning contradictions and corrections which were so dear to him in his work, or the laughter which was music to him. Yet the wonderful tenderness in all her words, and the wistful anxiety in her eyes at times, when they rested upon him in his great excitement and hopefulness at his work, made his happiness so perfect that, when, just once, he tried to tell her of his joy and gratitude, tears of real anguish—which had never before been visitants to Doris's eyes—sprang up and flooded them.

Mr. Bradford had been to Kingswood once during those three weeks, and roused everyone

by his caustic remarks and reproofs; indeed it seemed to all his old friends that the lawyer felt young Monkton's change of fortune and position even more keenly than he felt his own inability to wean his son from that all-engrossing pursuit which tallied so ill with the father's natural ambition for him. But still there was no prospect of a change. The indefatigable search to trace the late Scot Monkton's son had been entirely fruitless, and, as the lawyer himself dryly remarked,

“Here we are all huddled together upon a great full stop.”

Scot Monkton, through those three weeks, had gone very seldom to the Dower House; yet, living so near, and Colonel Egerton being so bent upon exercising an especial hospitality to “the young Squire,” and being so really won by him, of course it could not be but that he and Doris often met. And through these weeks the intercourse had been exactly what it had chanced to be in those few minutes of parting at the Black Birches—on his side, quiet and reserved, yet easy, and a little bit amused; on hers, friendly and pleasant, yet restless a little, as if tinctured with an uncomfortable

doubt, and at times rather childishly defiant.

It was a bright, keen afternoon in the beginning of December, when at last Hero came, saddled, to the door, led by Doris's groom, belted, and ready to follow on this ride of discovery. In her habit and hat, Doris stood in the hall, laughing over her aunt's lengthened instructions and warnings.

Miss Joan said *she* had never been allowed, as a girl, to do more than canter for an hour in Rotten Row, when she had had only a servant to accompany her; and she wondered Doris could not feel satisfied to confine herself to the park at Kingswood, so extensive and so beautiful as it was, and she with full permission to ride in it.

"But, auntie, why should this road be dangerous, just because it happens to be strange to us?"

"I don't know, my dear," said Miss Joan; "my words are silly, I dare say." And then she laid her soft white fingers on the chrysanthemums which Doris had put between the buttons of her habit, and the slight gesture was like a gentle, detaining touch.

For an instant Doris felt it so, and looked wistfully into her aunt's face.

“Aunt Joan, shall I stay?—would you rather that I stayed?”

And then Miss Joan, perverse in her very love for the girl, patted her upon the cheek, and bade her ride off and enjoy herself, and make haste home, to finish telling her the story she had just begun.

“For you see, my dear,” added the old lady, simply, “now that we have reached December, you have a good many chapters just to recall to my memory before we begin to read the last; so don’t be late, my dear. I’m afraid,” she added presently, looking out beyond the porch, to where Hero waited, her roan coat smooth and glossy as satin, “the tempest last night broke the branches in the avenues; and Hero is so shy, and so easily startled. It was a fearful wind, and I should not wonder if whole trees fell.”

“But, auntie, if they did, it was in the night. It is calm enough now, isn’t it?—all the more lovely after that storm, I think; and I will not lead Hero where the loose twigs lie under foot to aggravate her. Now, auntie, my last kiss.”

Miss Joan gave the last kiss lingeringly, and then stood in the porch, with a smile upon her

gentle face, while Doris mounted, looking as fresh and bright as the flowers in her breast. So pretty and so thoroughly at home on her beautiful roan mare, such a dainty picture altogether, that it was strange that the pleasant, gentle smile died so quickly on Miss Joan's lips, after her pet had turned, with her last nod and smile, from the gate.

She went back to her seat in the drawing-room, and took up a new magazine; but it would be of no use going on with the long stories, because eleven whole parts were at present a blank to her, and there was no Doris to "recall them to her mind." It was of no use getting her sewing, when she had no one to talk to (she to say this, whose life was chiefly spent alone!); nor was it of any use to try to take a nap. It was evident Miss Joan was ill at ease, for she decided presently to go to Comely Place, and have a chat with Margaret Chamberlain.

* * * * *

Scot Monkton intended to devote an hour or two that morning to the young horse he was breaking in for Major Porter, and so, about half an hour before Doris started, he left the Black

Birches, and rode through the park. It was seldom that he went past Kingswood; and even to-day, when, as was so unusual, he had no particular destination in view, he avoided the house, and turned up the slope behind, skirting the wood. As he passed the solitary cottage behind which the poplars stood on guard, he caught sight of Anna Wakeley, looking anxiously from the open doorway. Scot pulled up his rebellious horse at the gate, and gave her a cheery, kind "good morning."

"Looking for Oliver?" he asked. as she came forward with her work in her hand, her pleased smile failing to hide the anxiety with which she had glanced around her the moment she saw Mr. Monkton.

"No, sir, not Oliver," she answered, with her unfailing curtesy for "the Squire;" "Oliver's only just gone out; but he said he expected Mr. Sourdy back here to-day, and I was to be at home."

"He has been away, then, has he?"

"Yes, sir; he goes off every now and then. Of course, as Oliver says, he's lots of things to do and see after; but I know it's chiefly—betting." Anna dropped her voice

in real horror of the word, though she understood so little beyond what her personal knowledge of her lodger could have taught her.

"And Oliver bade you be at home," questioned Scot, turning from the other subject, "while you want to be elsewhere? Tell me, Anna, if I can leave any message for you. I am riding nowhere in particular to-day. Let me do something for you."

The woman's eyes were swimming in tears when she raised them to the handsome ones which looked down on her so kindly.

"You are always so good, sir; and yet——"

"So good!" laughed Scot, quietly. "I wonder how I can be good to any of you now. But, in any case, tell me the one thing I can do for you to-day."

"But presently perhaps, sir, when Mr. Sourdy's been in and had something to eat, I may manage to go; only I wish——"

"Listen, Anna," said Scot, in his quiet, earnest way; "you won't understand what I mean, I daresay, but, if it were not for me, you would not be pestered by this Frenchman; and so, knowing that, should I not naturally be glad

to do something for you, when you are tied in by the scou—by him?”

“But, Mr. Monkton—do forgive me for saying it, sir—I want above all things that he should not find *you* here. That’s why I do not want to keep you now for one minute. Please, sir”—the woman’s hands were tight upon the work which hung before her, and her eyes swept the slope from end to end, while the feverish colour came and went in her dark cheeks—“please, sir, listen to me just this once. Don’t—however kind you may be feeling towards me, as you always are—don’t come here while—Oliver and he are together.”

“What do you fear, Anna?” asked Scot, with a re-assuring smile.

“I—I don’t know what I fear, sir. Sometimes I fear nothing—nothing, sir. Oliver’s unsteady, and idle, and covetous, but not *that* bad. And then again I fear—I fear—until my life is one long ache and fever.”

“You want a little change, Anna,” said Scot, kindly. “Go over and see Mrs. Sutton, at Minton. She was always kind to you. I am going myself to-morrow, and I will drive you in, if you like.”

"Oh, no, no!" she faltered, starting back, as if his kind words had literally hurt her. Oh! no, thank you, sir; I have a good deal of change. I am often at the Black Birches, you know, sir, for Miss Windish gives me all your work to do; and Miss Egerton is very, very kind, and sends for me there whenever she can find any sewing as an excuse. No, it isn't that, sir."

"What a storm we had last night!" said Scot, feeling it would be more pitiful to turn Anna's thoughts from her evident, though unexplained fear. "Did it do you any harm here? We had our tiles blown off; Liath and I were working away on the roof, like two bricklayers, as soon as it was light this morning."

"It was the storm that made me want to go out now," returned Anna, smiling at last, as she pictured the young Squire at his work. "Oliver tells me, sir, that an immense piece of rock has been undermined, and has fallen across the River Road beyond Patten."

"And you want to see it?"

Anna smiled, that rare smile of hers which told a little pathetic story of her own unfamiliarity with pleasure for herself of any kind.

"No, sir, but I thought to go down to the Dower House and tell Miss Egerton, because she has often said she intended to ride that way some day, and I've heard remarks about her horse; and so I feel as if it would not be safe, for the rock's fallen nearly quite across the road, and it's just round the curve from here, so that she'd come unawares upon it before she knew. I thought I should like just to run down and tell her this, sir, in case she doesn't hear of it before she decides to go. Perhaps you were going to the Dower House, sir?"

"No, I was not going there," said Scot, quietly; "but I will take your message. I shall be sure to find Miss Egerton at home this morning."

"You will show her the danger, won't you, sir? I am so glad and so much obliged to you. I cannot settle to my work, sir, for thinking of it, for you can hardly guess how kind she's been to me ever since she came."

"Yes, I can guess," said Scot, very quietly. And then, seeing that Anna's anxiety had been deep and real for Doris, and knowing she would be more at ease after he was gone, he said only a few words more and left her.

In a trot, which grew a little more easy and regular as he devoted all his attention to the step of his young horse, Scot rode down the slope, and made for the handsome stone bridge in the park. On this bridge it was that Vaulter, waking suddenly to the conviction that his peculiar rights to this highway were infringed upon by an unfamiliar cavalcade which met him, shied back against the low grey wall, and turned round and round like a teetotum, with an evident haziness as to which was his head and which his tail.

Rose and Violet Levey pulled up their sedate-looking quadrupeds, and waited anxiously; while Scot—raising his hat and greeting them laughingly the while—went through a process of gradually convincing Vaulter that it would display a greater equine discretion, and decidedly tend to his peace of mind, if he decided on his head's being the better part to go forward, and tried the experiment. Vaulter thought it over for a moment or two, with his forelegs suspended in the air, and then gave in without a sigh, deeply engrossed in planning a future course that should baffle the skill which at present he was unwillingly forced to acknowledge.

"We were just thinking of turning, Mr. Monkton," said Rose, with a strict adherence to the letter of the truth, as they certainly had had every intention of turning when they met him; "we have come far enough for this morning. Oh, do take care of that dangerous horse! I feel so nervous."

"You are not going straight home, I hope, Mr. Monkton," put in Violet, meditating the possibility of Vaulter's allowing her to wheel round to his other side. "You will see us safely home, won't you?"

"I am going first to the Dower House. I am bearing a message to Miss Egerton."

Scot said it frankly and coolly, as he kept his fingers tight upon Vaulter's rein; while the young animal submitted with grace (which was all show, and had nothing to do with his disposition) to his compulsory education, and stepped daintily and haughtily over the bridge.

"Then I am glad we are able to save you the trouble of a journey in vain," said Miss Levey, with a new tone in her hard, unmusical voice. "You would not find Miss Egerton at home, for we have just seen her riding with her groom."

"Where, Miss Levey?"

"Down to the River Road. We should probably have joined her," added Rose, languidly, "only we don't like that way for riding. She seemed as if she had made up her mind to enjoy herself, for she cantered out upon the River Road as if she delighted in her freedom, and could canter so to the world's end. What is it, Mr. Monkton?"

But Rose had received no answer.

"What was it?" she inquired, turning blankly to her sister.

"I don't know," retorted Violet, pettishly. "He said something about danger—what nonsense, when I've known him gallop round there to Minton a hundred times!—and then he begged our pardon for hurrying off, and was gone in a moment, as you saw."

As they saw indeed!

"Is the horse running away with him?" faltered Rose, below her breath, and turning anxiously to their groom, who had drawn up to them in their pause:

"No, miss; at present Mr. Monkton has him well in hand, but it's a dangerous pace, unless he keeps to the park."

“He is going along the River Road; he spoke of danger there.”

The groom drew in his lips ominously, and they all stood for a time just where Scot had left them, watching how he gave the young horse his head, and galloped out of sight.

CHAPTER V.

DORIS rode from Kingswood Park towards the River Road at a canter, as Miss Levey had told Scot. The wind went past her with a rush, and its kiss left rosy blushes on her fresh, cold cheeks. Hero was so full of spirit that there was the keen enjoyment of enterprise in guiding her to-day; and is the sense of youth and health and freedom ever more dominant than in a rapid canter against the bracing wind?

The effects of the storm were apparent even on this River Road. Here there lay leaves and twigs scattered from the shrubbery thicket; and there fragments of loose earth, or of soiled wool which the wind had borne from the thorns and hedges where the wandering sheep had left it. Yet how thoroughly and entirely the storm

itself had passed away from the clear, cold air, and how soft and balmy was this fresh wintry breeze which followed it!

In Doris's heart rang a perfect song of gladness, none the less bright for being wordless; and she cantered on, to the rhythm of her thoughts, and to the music of the river as it flowed below her. She bent to pat Hero's glossy neck, and then threw back her head again, her lips apart, her eyes lustrous in their supreme enjoyment.

Straight as a line sped Hero. There was no hindrance on this solitary way, and her step never swerved, nor did her pace slacken, until she had cantered quite two miles along this River Road.

Doris glanced behind, but without drawing rein. She had given her groom an errand on his way, but she fancied he might be in sight now, though she had come so fast. The way lay straight and all exposed, so he would see her before she rode past the point which lay just before her now—a curve which Hero would take daintily, in this true, swinging step of hers. So Doris, firm and easy in her saddle, turned to see if Lloyd had ridden into sight; while Hero

cantered on, with a little snort of pure enjoyment, as a notice to the wind and to the river that she felt as free as they, in spite of the reins she bore so gently. On and on, lightly and fleetly round the bend, and then in front of her, and close upon her, lay a rugged mass of rock, blocking the way, save just one foot's space between it and that sheer precipice down to the river. But, if there were any path at all, why should not Hero pass ?

Just at that moment it was that Doris turned her eyes from their backward glance, and saw this danger which now it was too late to shun.

* * * * *

Scot Monkton, after passing out of sight of Rose and Violet Levey, as they stood upon the bridge to watch him, rode on, still at a pace to which the young horse not only submitted, but of which he highly approved. He shook his short black mane, and, with a tighter hold upon the bit, pierced the future with his nose, to the extent allowed him by the reins, against which he chafed with meritorious persistence. Without a thought for his horse, though training him unconsciously as he guided him, Scot rode on to the River Road. He had almost reached the

bend, when he overtook Miss Egerton's groom going forward at an easy trot, though his mistress was not in sight. Without waiting to hear the man's explanation, Scot stopped abruptly and dismounted, with a sign to Lloyd to stop too.

"Stay here," he said, in low, quick tones, "and take care of the horses. Don't bring them forward—and keep them quiet."

Not by any means did Lloyd rejoice to find himself left with these instructions, and the sole charge of a thoroughbred, who was too young yet to have adopted—or to think of taking—any way but his own; but he was a conscientious servant, and, besides that, there had been something in Mr. Monkton's manner—quiet and self-possessed as it was—which had given him an indefinite and uncomfortable alarm. What had Mr. Monkton feared?

Ah, what indeed?

Had he feared anything so terrible as the sight which met him when, after he had passed the curve in the road, he stood one moment with his eyes shaded, his strong muscular form swaying backward—for that one instant—like a girl's?

Many a time afterwards did the sight come back to him in troubled dreams, and from such dreams he always awoke in the same quietude of intense terror, and with those same icy drops upon his brow, of which he was unconscious then, when he met the great peril face to face.

He saw that Hero had tried to pass the narrow margin of roadway left by the fallen rock, and, in doing so, had slipped ; and now, while her body hung above the sheer descent to the river, she had grasped the edge of the road, and retained her hold only by her fore-feet. Her breath broke the silence by strokes of loud, quick agony ; flakes of foam stood on her head and neck, and her eyes started from their sockets.

And to the saddle Doris clung, with a strained, trembling grip ; her bowed head bare, and her eyes closed, as if she would shut out all terror, if she could, in the solemn thought of that swift, brief passage which awaited her.

But the moment which fixed this scene upon Scot's mind—so firmly that no after happiness or misery could ever efface it—was but a moment after all ; and it had passed, and left him his own self once more, cool and daring and alert.

First, as Doris herself had done, he looked round to see if there were anything within possible reach of her hands—not with Doris's certainty that it was her only hope, but in his dread of frightening Hero by his own approach. But no; not even a root of fern was near. And then, though thought after thought flashed through his mind, Scot saw that only one rescue was possible. For a moment he had meditated taking Hero's bridle, and, by sheer strength, pulling her to her feet upon the road, while Doris kept her seat by that grasp upon the saddle. But even with the project came the conviction of its impracticability. What were *his* strength and weight compared with Hero's? And where was the space necessary for her to regain her footing on the road, as she struggled up? There had not been room for her even to pass; then how could she ever stand *across* the way? No; that scheme would be as fatal as leaving horse and rider to fall when their over-taxed strength should be exhausted.

One following another—or rather one upon another—did a number of impossible means of rescue dart into Scot's mind; yet still only a few moments had passed when he had discarded,

as utterly impossible, all but one ; and this might indeed have been his first and only thought, so quickly had it grown into a steady, fixed resolve.

Doris—with all her power concentrated in the grip of her strained fingers, and all her consciousness merged in the awful consciousness of being utterly helpless in her peril—suddenly lifted her head from her horse's neck ; eyes and lips were both unclosed, and a vivid flash of hope—which in that awful situation it was most pitiful to see—rushed into her white face. Scot Monkton was literally alarmed to see how his quiet call upon her name had scattered in a moment her death-like calm, and given her a new tingling vitality of hope and confidence.

Just as a man struggling with death in the dark and solitary waters, would feel that he was safe when he could see friendly lights and faces in the vessel above him, though he had not yet grasped the rope within his hands, so Doris felt saved when Scot quietly called her by name. Her hands loosed their hold, and were held out in utter reliance to meet his. Scot, his feet planted firmly, and every muscle tense and strong, stood on the edge of the road at Hero's .

side; and while he balanced himself he leaned forward, his hands firmly and steadily extended to Doris, while Hero's panting breath grew louder and harder, and her head was strained forward, with one last struggle which made the sinews in her neck rise like cables.

"No, no; don't shrink from trusting your whole weight to me!"—Scot whispered the words hurriedly and anxiously; for one moment's delay now might be fatal.—"It is our only chance. Hold fast to my hands—very fast; and leave all else to me."

"But—if you fall—dragged down by——"

"Come!" he interrupted, with quiet, grave authority.

She had her fingers round his, before even that word was uttered; but it did not depend upon her holding fast to him. When once their hands had met, it was *his* clasp which held her; and far above the consciousness of her own helplessness was the consciousness of his power. For the brief second after she rose in her saddle, until she felt her knees touch and cling to the firm ground, she had no feeling beyond that of simple, brave reliance upon him.

He raised her from her knees, and then paus-

ed one instant, still with her hands in his, while she stood with her feet entangled in her habit, and her eyes fixed upon his face.

“How can I ever be thankful enough?” she whispered.

But after the one look down, as she had stood before him, her fingers locked in his, he had turned away, as if the sight of the great trust and gratitude upon her face were not good for him to see.

“Oh, no, Mr. Monkton—no!” she cried, catching his arm, when she saw that he was going to make a hopeless effort to save her horse. But she had no need for that spasm of alarm; for even as she spoke there was a grating sound, and Hero fell.

Doris made a swift step forwards, forgetful that her habit clung about her feet; and then, close to the edge of the road as it was, she stumbled, and would have fallen forward, down the very precipice from which she had just been rescued, but that Scot had seen the awkward involuntary step, and caught her and held her back.

Doris, glad of his support, and looking eagerly down to the water in her anxiety about her horse, could not see that this was what Scot, in his

bravery, had turned away to avoid. He held her firm and safe as she leaned over the perpendicular descent, looking where, so far below her, her favourite had fallen with that terrible splash which had brought a cry from her lips ; and she neither saw the new, sad struggle in his face, nor felt his chest heave in its suppressed emotion.

“ She is safe,” he said, quietly, when Doris turned her anxious face to his, with a mute question, while she still stood within his strong restraining arm. “ Hero is safe ; she is swimming to the opposite bank.”

“ Oh, will she reach it ?”

So absorbed was Doris in her anxious watching that she had no other thought, and so, in simple ignorance, she could bear to stand there in Scot's protection, while his heart beat so heavily, and while his face grew stiff and pallid in this new joy—which he knew to be a forbidden joy, and, from this moment, never to be his again.

“ See !—see ! Oh ! Mr. Monkton, Hero is safe ! Look how she lifts her head and shakes the water from her mane ! Oh ! how shall I ever thank you for our lives ?”

He had quietly unclasped his arms now, and she stepped back into the wider road, and, with her habit in her hands, and her bright, loosened hair pushed from her temples, looked wistfully at him, with again that vivid flash of gratitude in the innocent blue eyes.

“If—if you had not come——”

Never, even to her own thoughts, did Doris acknowledge what it was which stayed her words just then, and brought to her eyes such a sudden flood of childish, miserable tears.

Her nerves had been overwrought, and now, in the reaction, what more natural than these tears?

So Scot thought, while there faded from his face the very look which had in reality brought the tears, and while still his pulses throbbed so quickly and unsteadily. So he thought, and he let the tears have their way, knowing they would do her good, and picturing how blue and bright and happy her eyes would presently shine through them.

Then he picked up the hat he had thrown off before he went to rescue her, and, folding it together (it was a soft felt hat which belonged to the old Kingswood days), put it into his

pocket, and buttoned his thick coat over it. If she were hatless, he would be so too; and all the time he seemed so calm and so unhurried, while Doris stood with her head drooped and her eyes covered, and the tears falling fast amid her sobs.

“Miss Egerton, shall we walk on now?”

When he began to speak, his hand went out as if to touch hers, and his voice was stirred by a great yearning; but in an instant his hand was drawn back, and his voice was simply kind and very steady.

Presently her tears ceased, and she looked up—a very doleful little picture, with the ruffled hair on her temples, and her eyes still wet with tears. The girl's life had been so smooth and sunny, and the love which had enfolded her had left her so utterly a stranger to all suffering, save that of pity and compassion, that what wonder was it if now—when the sharpest pang which pierced her was this new acute and intense sympathy—she should feel so weak and helpless?

“Shall we walk on now?” said Scot again, in those kind, quiet tones, which sounded almost calm.

"I have never thanked you," said Doris, looking at him wistfully. "I wish I could."

"What have I done?" he asked, his voice quite low, though shaken by a suppressed and curbed excitement. "The branch of a tree, if it had been within reach, would have saved you as effectually as my hands saved you, and Hero's escape is owing to herself. Had you any idea before that Hero swam as cleverly as Leander?"

As if with a sudden recollection, brought by these light words, Doris shook back her hair, gathered her habit in her hands, and turned to walk towards her home, with only one swift glance to where her horse, with hanging reins, was cantering to and fro in the low meadow on the opposite side the river.

"Yes, Mr. Monkton, I am ready. I cannot think," she said, presently, "where Lloyd can be. Oh, there he is!—and he has your horse, too, Mr. Monkton. Oh, I see."

How much of the truth she saw Scot did not ask; he gave Lloyd directions how to reach Hero, and then took the bridle of his own horse over his arm, and once more walked on with Doris. They met but one little group of

people along that unfrequented road, and when they had passed, Doris turned, with a laugh into her companion's face, to surmise what people would think of two hatless and dismounted equestrians. And Scot, quite lightly, though without a laugh, wondered where a hat would be likely to land if it fell just there, and how soon a reward would be offered for the body belonging to the hat.

Then they walked on again, in a silence of which they both seemed unaware, until they stood, to separate, at the gate of the Dower House. Then Doris, being very weak and shy and grateful, looked up and begged Scot to come in with her, and once again brokenly tried to thank him ; and Scot, being very brave in this temptation, shook his head, and, slipping Vaulter's bridle to his left hand, offered her his right.

"I see that the two horses have returned. You will not mind the lost hat, I hope, as that is all you have to regret, Miss Egerton?"

"But yours?" she said, still with that nervous, anxious smile upon her lips. "I am so sorry."

"I shall find mine," he said, and he dropped her hand and turned away and mounted.

She stood at the gate and watched him out of sight ; but after that parting moment he rode on through the park, and never turned to see the earnest look which followed him, and which would have brightened into a smile at his backward glance.

“I—wish,” said Doris, softly, to herself, as she walked up the lawn, “it had been Kenneth, because—I like to owe everything to Kenneth—everything.”

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER making the rabbit-pie with her own hands—Miss Windish emphasised the adjective, as if fully aware of her superiority over those housekeepers who make rabbit-pies with hands to which they can lay no direct personal claim—it certainly was most provoking to have to submit to its gradual destruction beside the fire in the kitchen, while her temper—Miss Michal did not admit this, but the fact was self-evident—was as gradually succumbing to circumstances beside the fire in the dining-room.

“For two hours,” she sighed, with that slow rocking to and fro which was habitual to her in her moments of dolor, “I have kept up just the fire he likes—all to be wasted; and he will come in starved, and want to throw on all the coal.”

Simultaneously with this doleful reflection a bright idea dawned upon Miss Michal. She

rose with the greatest alacrity, and, seizing the coal-box, drew it on its castors under her easy-chair, scientifically secreting it by expanding her skirts when she sat down again. Cheered by the consciousness that all unlawful extravagance in coal was now out of his reach, she uttered a mournful ejaculation of "Poor Scot! Poor Scot!"

Once or twice she took the shovel and, with a mild air of deprecation, and a sort of mute appeal to the fire to keep its extravagant spirits within bounds, pressed it on the flame, wondering how she could have been tempted to build one which should burn away so swiftly. But, in spite of her little practical appeal, it glowed and blazed, and asserted, on its own account, the warmth and welcome Miss Michal thought it so wise to subdue.

There was no tread upon the gravel even yet, and no opening of that old front door, which always creaked its warning in a manner which she fully understood to foreshadow the speedy downfall of the house. But presently she heard Scot's step across the hall from the back door, the eager scraping of dogs' feet, and one short, sharp bark of greeting.

Miss Michal, just turning to make sure that her small black skirt quite hid the coal-box, subsided into a limp depression.

"It's two hours after dinner-time," she sighed, as Scot came slowly up to her.

"Is it, Aunt Michal?"

"Oh, then you've dined at the Dower House, of course!" she exclaimed, in a tone of vexation which was the rather natural consequence of his indifference as to the dinner hour.

"No."

"Dear me, Scot! how strange of you to leave there so late, and yet not have dined with them!"

"It was not late," returned Scot, absently; "the turret clock at Kingswood struck three as I left the gate."

"Three," exclaimed Miss Michal—but her wonderment was less for the words than for something she could read, yet could not understand, in the face of the young man, as he stood opposite her—"and now it's eight, Scot!"

It may have been the little lady's frank and natural surprise, or it may have been the information itself which startled him. He apologised with a laugh which was not very familiar

to Miss Michal, yet was a great relief after that uncomfortable feeling he had momentarily roused.

"Why were you sitting in the firelight, Aunt Michal?" he asked, as she rang the bell, keeping her seat over the coal-box; for though it did not seem as if an opportunity for unlawful extravagance would be seized by him with any avidity, yet of course she could not be quite sure until his mind had turned itself to dinner.

"I will light the lamp," she said, resignedly; "I did not want light while I sat alone doing nothing. I feel painfully my inability to earn any money, Scot; but I am fortunately able to save a little now and then."

"Thank you, Aunt Michal; but I wish that you had no need to do it."

"Oh, I like it!" she cried, with one of her rapid changes, as she stood at the sideboard, fixing the globe on the lamp with extreme caution. "It's the least I can do, Scot, when you are always thinking of your debts."

"Always!" echoed Scot, as he waited to carry the lamp to the dinner-table. "There's nothing else which it is half so good for me to think of."

Never did Miss Michal remember making a rabbit-pie to less purpose than she had made this: Scot, even while, as usual, he lightened her deep anxiety by a pleasant compliment upon her achievement, made a mere pretence of helping himself; and she decided, on her own part, that to wait for two hours, with the consciousness of a rabbit-pie's gradually spoiling the while, was an effectual remedy for appetite.

When Elizabeth had carried away the cloth, and after the usual formula of a mutual and unaccepted invitation to take wine, Miss Windish—with a sigh, as she recalled her usual habit of dropping sleepily into her arm-chair at the fire, while Scot's cornet, or his jesting words, or his reading, supplied a pleasant background—felt that this evening would be quite different, and grew very brisk and alert, knitting away uprightly, while she ransacked the neat little recesses of her mind for scraps of animating information.

“A man called here to-day, Scot, to buy old umbrellas. I don't like those men as a rule, but he was highly respectable.”

“It's a highly respectable profession.”

“And, Scot, my dear,” resumed Miss Michal,

greatly relieved by this symptom of a jest—though of course sternly determined not to betray the slightest pleasure at anything so natural as Scot's breaking through the odd and heavy silence which held him, and which she was keen enough to see that he was making an effort to break—"he bought that old umbrella of yours. It was utterly worn out, and I made a capital bargain. He had wanted at first to give me four-pence for it—it's odd how those men always have the desire at their heart to cheat you—but I always knew what a bargain was, Scot, and I was staunch, and would not let him have it under sixpence."

There was nothing forced about Scot's laugh now.

"What is it?" she asked, greatly encouraged.

"Had the highly respectable gentleman seen the gold name-plate on the handle?"

"Oh, Scot!"

Little Miss Michal's face of horror, with its round light eyes and its elongated cheeks, was so irresistibly comic that Scot laughed again.

"Oh, Scot, I quite forgot! What was it worth?"

"About half a sovereign, I should say; but what does it matter, Aunt Michal? If I'd had the plate, I dare say I should have been tempted to buy a new umbrella to put it on—a senseless idea, for I don't like them."

Scot said this quite merrily, and there never followed a taunting word about his aunt's boasted skill in bargaining; so Miss Michal of course had no further inclination to give vent to her tears. They would have started at once into the two little wide-open reservoirs, but that Scot's laugh was over, and she detected again the undercurrent of sadness.

"I was stupid," she said, briskly changing her tactics; "but we shall find him, Scot. He'll be taken up soon for cheating some one else, and then I shall appear and get that gold plate." Miss Michal did not afford any surplus of information as to how her very mild appearance was to effect this; but Scot seemed satisfied with the probability. "Miss Levey called in as they rode past this afternoon," she resumed, taking up the thread of her attempt to entertain him. "She was most anxious about your horse; I found out she was really frightened, though at first I fancied somebody had put her

out of temper. She stayed quite an hour, I'm sure, and she made herself most agreeable. It was she who told me about your having ridden after Miss Egerton. She does not like Doris Egerton, I think, Scot; and yet I'm perfectly sure her brother is paying his addresses to her with all his might and main. Don't you think so?"

"What?"

"That Mr. Levey has fallen in love with Miss Egerton, and that it is a great pity."

"It cannot be helped," said Scot, with strange quietness.

"But it is not only unnecessary in her case, as she is engaged, but it is such a pity. It spoils a girl who is so young and fresh."

"Is it for her sake, then, that you mind, Aunt Michal? Why, the gift of a man's love is nothing new to her; and, though Kenneth Bradford loves her as his very life, he cannot prevent other men being as mad—even now that it is too late."

"Don't speak so sternly about it, Scot," remarked Miss Windish. "Why should you? Of course I cannot really blame either of them; Doris Egerton is very lovable, and it is but

natural that Mr. Levey should want a pretty and aristocratic wife. I only mean that no girl ought to have more than one offer—that's all."

There was a pause between them then. It had fallen hopelessly upon them, in spite of Miss Windish's determination, and, while she sat knitting—as if her very life were held by the feeble tenure of a possibility of finishing her stocking—she glanced now and then across into Scot's face, with a new reticence upon her, as thoroughly and entirely inexplicable as it was unusual.

"I wonder," she mused to herself, a long time afterwards, dropping her knitting and ringing for tea as a relief, "why I should have taken into my mind just then that ridiculous idea of the iron entering into a man's soul—absurd!"

"Scot," she said, standing meekly at the young man's side, when Elizabeth had placed the low tea-table upon the rug, "what is that long sad thought?"

"Tea-time?" cried Scot, raising his head quickly, with a smile for her. "Then you too must have been silent for a long time, Aunt Michal."

“Oh, Scot,” she sobbed, plaintively, folding her two hands on his shoulder, “to think that you should ever be brought to such straits, and that I should prove not only no help, but—but get scarcely any bargains. Oh, Scot, my dear, go back to Kingswood! You know I don’t often speak of it ; but it is cruel to see it empty, and all that immense mass of money wasted ; when by lifting your finger——”

“Hush, Aunt Michal!” said Scot, gently, taking down her hands, and rising, as if he could thus more readily leave behind him the thought she had broken. “I think we are most snug and comfortable. Shall I make the tea for a change?”

How was it? Miss Michal argued with herself, lost in her wide surmises. How was it that he could so cheerfully set aside the very thought of Kingswood, and adapt himself to his cramped life here, while yet there had been upon his face that look of intense longing which now she fancied she must have seen there before?

“Has—has anything occurred to harass you to-day, Scot?” she asked, falling back upon the plain question.

"I'm sorry to say there has," answered Scot, sweetening the cups with unnatural gravity. "Wait till I've experimented upon the teapot."

"Now you've finished, Scot," put in Miss Michal, anxious for her reply. "You have no idea how comical you look; and you need not have poured quite so slowly. Well?"

"Well, I've been greatly exercised in my mind by that highly respectable dealer in umbrellas."

"I'm so glad," cried Miss Michal, breathing freely once again. "I had been laying it to that old Frenchman. You're sure that's all?"

"All! Could the human mind sustain a heavier pressure?"

* * * * *

"Oh, Doris, my darling, to think what it might have been!"

The girl, still in her habit, was sitting with her head against her aunt's knee, as she had always loved to sit as a child when she had anything serious or sad to say; and now she had been telling of her danger and her rescue. Miss Joan's hand was on the bright hair, which still hung in loosened twists, and her very heart spoke in the frightened tones.

"Oh, Doris darling, to think what it might have been!"

"Perhaps," said Doris, her eyes intent and wondering in their gaze upon the fire, "I should have fallen safely with Hero, Aunt Joan. It—it might have been better."

"Better, my dear! Could anything have been better than Mr. Monkton's happening to pass just then, and being so cool and prompt? Doris, my pet, where is your gratitude?"

"My gratitude? Oh, Aunt Joan!"

No—it was no wonder, Miss Joan said. She had had a good cry herself, which had refreshed her greatly after her breathless and terrified reception of the broken recital; but still, of course, it was no wonder Doris trembled so. But the excitement, however natural, must not be encouraged.

"You have been home a long time, my dear; what have you been doing, not to have changed your habit?"

"Only thinking, Aunt Joan. Just sitting here and—thinking."

Miss Joan raised the young face and kissed it softly.

"Thinking is well at such a time, my love,"

she whispered, "for I know what your thought would be."

Then she altered her tone, and hurried Doris away to change her dress, that she might be ready for her father.

It was but natural that Colonel Egerton's eyes should so lovingly follow his daughter that night, as she moved about the rooms with a new, quiet gravity; and, in the haunting sense of having so nearly lost her, quite natural it was, too, that she seemed doubly precious to him.

"Doris," he said to her, once in the evening, putting his arm round her as she hovered about him, "you must not go about like a ghost, just waiting upon me and Aunt Joan, and forgetting your old laugh and *badinage*. No, this won't do, pet. We must have Kenneth down. Shall you venture to tell him of this sad day's work, my dear?" he added, kissing her with great tenderness.

"Tell Kenneth!" she echoed, gently. "Yes, papa, I shall tell Kenneth. I shall always tell Kenneth everything."

"That's well, of course, my dear; but—poor Kenneth!"

"Oh! father," she cried, with a strange sudden passion, as he kissed her once again, "let me—let me stay with you always."

"My darling, it did not need this alarm to show us how dear we are to each other. But Kenneth is not going to take you far away from me; besides, I have promised, and his heart would break."

"Yes, father," she said, with one quick, tearless sob; "I—I was not thinking of what I said. It was so sweet to feel how you loved me, that, for that moment, I did not think of how—how I could never break my promise to Kenneth—never!"

"Now sing to me, dear. I shall not go down to the Black Birches to thank Mr. Monkton to-night, for it might be an intrusion; but I shall be off before you are down in the morning. What message shall I take from you?"

"You will know best, father," she said, going at once to the piano; while all the time there rose between her eyes and the notes a vision of the room down at the old farm.

"Doris," said Miss Joan's voice, breaking in among the harmonies, as she turned her head

and passed on the message which a servant had brought, "you are wanted, dear. Don't stay out in the cold."

Without any surprise, without even any change in her dreamy, wistful expression, Doris left the room at once, to find Anna Wakeley in the hall, timidly shrinking from the lamplight; shrinking even farther back, it seemed, as Doris went kindly towards her.

"Oh! Anna, how late it is for you to have walked here, along that dark, solitary way! Is anything the matter?"

"I want to speak to you, Miss Egerton," the woman whispered, glancing fearfully around her in the lighted hall, and never letting her eyes rest upon the pretty, kind face so near her own; "I want to speak to you, but I am afraid."

"Fowles," said Doris, turning to the butler, who was crossing the hall just then, "will you send some hot wine and water to my dressing-room, for Mrs. Wakeley? I want to speak to her there. Come, Anna."

"It is so usual for you to come here about your work," she added, when she had closed the door upon them, "that no one will wonder."

“Miss Egerton,” began Anna Wakeley, eagerly, “will you give me a little work to-night—anything,—just to serve as an excuse when I—when I go back?”

So Doris, always thoughtful, and keen to read what was kindest, spread some work upon the couch, and was planning it busily with Anna, when her maid entered the room with the tray which Fowles had prepared; and Anna, her head bent, and her eyes fixed upon the muslin as if she could thus hide their eager, timid restlessness, was drawing her breath hard and quick.

“Take it with you, Anna, and do it when you can.” So Doris said, as she crossed the room, and locked the door behind her maid.

Then she watched Anna take the wine, refusing to hear a word until it was finished.

“Difficult as it may be to you to drink it,” she said, gently, “it will do you good after your long cold walk.”

“Miss Egerton,” whispered Anna, with the same shrinking, and the same hurried glance around her, even in the locked room, “I have come to beg a favour of you. You are so kind that I think you will not refuse me even this.”

"Indeed I will not, Anna."

Anna looked again round the room—the pretty bright room, lighted so softly and richly by its wax-lights and the wide, low fire—and then her eyes rested on the young lady, who stood there ready and willing to help her.

A pretty girl in a white dress, in a pretty room. Was that all? Yes, all; if the sympathy which is boundless, and the love which is pure and pitiful, have no beauty of their own.

"Miss Egerton," said Anna, still in the same shrinking attitude, though her words were less broken now in their intense eagerness, "if it were ever known why I have been here to-night, I should never live to come again—I think. You understand, and you will—save me."

"Oh, Anna," whispered Doris, laying her warm little hands on the woman's locked fingers, "how sad, how sad! But do you think I ever *could* betray you?"

"No, no; don't look so kindly at me, please. Let me get it said. Miss Egerton, I trust you so entirely! Will you do this one thing I am come to ask?"

"Yes."

Simply though the word was uttered, its truth and steadfastness were beyond words.

"You yourself—you will not give it to any one else to do?"

"No."

"Oh, Miss Egerton, will you promise this? Pray, pray, let me feel it as a promise!"

"It is a sacred promise, Anna. I know you would not plead with me to do a wrong or impossible thing for you, so I have promised."

"Thank God!"

She took her hands from Doris's, and pushed the hair from her temples, still catching her breath in hurried gasps.

"I cannot say all I need, Miss Egerton; words choke me to-night. This is what I pray you to do—yourself—no one else. Oh, tell no one else, in pity to me! To-morrow night"—the words sank here to the lowest whisper—"Mr. Monkton must watch at the Green Pits. Will you tell him?"

"I?"

The word was a cry, uttered as Doris uttered it.

"Oh, Miss Egerton, you refuse?" cried Anna, with the sharpness of a great shock. "And I

can ask no one else ; and—it is for his sake ! If you refuse, there is no one else can help him. I dare not warn any one else. I dare not trust any one else. If I warn him myself my own life is in danger, and, if he is not warned, *his* own life——”

“I will do it, Anna,” said Doris, so gently in the woman’s sobbing pause, that no one could have guessed the pain she stifled. “I will tell him this. No other ears shall hear, and your name shall never be breathed. Trust me, Anna ; I have promised. I will do it all myself—only I.”

CHAPTER VII.

IT had been daylight barely for an hour, yet Colonel Egerton's visit at the Black Birches was over, and he was walking down the garden with Scot Monkton. The two friends stopped at the gate, the eyes of both straying beyond the Larch Walk to the windows of the Dower House, and for a few moments there was silence—for Scot could not well enlarge upon the heartfelt thanks reiterated by Doris's father. Colonel Egerton stood beside the gate, his dress fashionable, his face, with its soft white hair, refined and high-bred, his bearing calm and soldierly; yet young Monkton, leaning near him in the working suit which Miss Michal pathetically designated a "keeper costume," his brown hair uncovered, and his slight muscular hands show-

ing themselves no strangers to hard work, bore withal a still prouder stamp of aristocracy.

"I do so wish you would come," urged Colonel Egerton, earnestly. "My daughter was very anxious that I should persuade you. They will wait breakfast in the hope of your accompanying me. My cousin leaves us soon, and Doris has much to say to you, because yesterday she could scarcely utter her thanks. We will not try to detain you. Just let me prevail upon you."

Colonel Egerton pleaded earnestly as well as courteously, but none the less in vain. Scot, with a thorough appreciation of the kind motive both of father and daughter—though of course he could guess nothing of Doris's chief reason for wishing to see him to-day—declined the visit, and, after a repetition of his companion's thanks and regret, turned back to the house.

Doris, standing shyly beside the staircase window, saw her father returning alone up the Larch Walk, and turned away with a slow, quiet sigh. Yet she had never felt that Scot would come. She had spoken the simple truth that morning when she had told her father—

surprising him by her early appearance to see him off—that she knew he would not bring Mr. Monkton.

“No, my dear, he would not come,” said Colonel Egerton, when Doris met him, and looked at him questioningly.

“I wish,” he added, presently, after he had maintained a very unusual silence half through his breakfast, “Monkton would come here oftener. The houses are so near. When I lived here before, he was for ever popping in, and made this house seem all one with Kingswood. It is such a pity for him to isolate himself.”

Miss Bradford repeated the word with a laugh.

“Why, Tom, Mr. Monkton could never isolate himself, if he tried the experiment. It is not in the power of such natures as his. No man could fail more signally in an attempt to isolate himself.”

“Well, I wish—as Kingswood seems out of the question—that he were better off down at the Black Birches.”

“Is he poor, father?”

“Yes, dear—when is my cup coming back?—of course he’s poor. I suppose you will say

it is a feather in his cap, eh, being a romantic little dame?"

"Yes."

"I thought so, as you have not inherited a grain of your father's common sense. Joan," he added, with an irrepressible satisfaction in the would-be stern glance he directed towards his cousin, "you and Kenneth have much to answer for, in making my little girl so fanciful. I recognise your own whimsical ideas."

"Not mine this time," replied Miss Joan, in her pleasant voice; "Doris's own—or George Herbert's, perhaps. He saw in a poor man not only God's image, but 'Christe's stamp to boot'—you remember?"

"Pooh, pooh!" interposed Colonel Egerton, cheerily. "Don't let us get sentimental over Mr. Monkton's poverty; it is voluntary and absurd."

"As a cynic, you are a failure, papa," said Doris, smiling.

"As a sensible person, you are a far greater failure, little lady. Eat some breakfast, and chatter away. I feel as if the world were standing still when you forget to laugh and tease."

“And when I tease you, the world goes whirling round too fast. Major Porter may well say, ‘There’s always a great deal of contradiction about a military man.’”

But, though Doris spoke so lightly, her heart was very heavy this morning. All through her restless night, she had unconsciously built upon the hope of her father’s bringing Mr. Monkton back with him, and had arranged various methods of speaking privately to him at the Dower House. But all those plans had crumbled into nothing now; and what opportunity could she find of giving the warning which she must give to-day to Scot himself?

One after another, wildly and without coherence, plans presented themselves to her during this silence to which her father so strongly objected; but not one rose from the confusion in any distinct or available form, and it was in literal terror that she saw, in fancy, how that day might slip away and leave her still hesitating, and her promise unfulfilled. And besides this uncertainty as to her own best course of action, was the burden of concealment, so new to her. Had the secret been her own, she would long ago have confided it to her aunt,

and won assistance in the arrangement for an interview with Mr. Monkton. But, though the temptation visited her again and again, she had no fear of yielding to it, even in an unguarded moment; for always deep-rooted and steadfast was the knowledge that the secret was not hers.

But—though Doris did not know this—the burden of this first secret would not have been removed, even if lightened for her, by Miss Joan's sympathy and help; for deepest of all lay her intense anxiety for that night to pass safely by, without danger to anyone at the Black Birches. And this burden of her own share in it was, after all, but a feather's weight compared with that fear for Scot which was so preponderant above all.

Now and then during the morning, Miss Bradford's uneasy gaze followed the girl's restless quiet movements; and once or twice she spoke her thoughts aloud.

“What is it, dear? Are you anxious about the weather, that you haunt the window so? Or are you looking for some one?” Then, “Are you poorly, Doris, that you look so pale and cannot settle to anything?”

At each reminder, Doris would turn to some task, with a jest at her own idleness. But presently Miss Joan saw the return of the harassing thought, and of the anxious (yet inexplicable) watchfulness.

"The child must be expecting Kenneth," she decided, at last, to her own quiet satisfaction; "but, as she is so unusually shy about it, I will say nothing."

Though minute by minute this weight increased upon her, still it seemed to Doris that the morning hours literally flew by; so eager, yet so powerless, was she to grasp one for her purpose. But when luncheon was over, and there fell that long presage of the dusk of the December afternoon, this nervous uncertainty left her. She had wasted all the hours, and even minutes, which she dared waste, without chance giving her the opportunity she so eagerly sought. Now she must make the opportunity for herself, in spite of everything. There was no alternative now; she had but simply to do her best in the one course open to her—that of seeking Scot in his own home.

Colonel Egerton was going to drive into Minton to dine at mess, and Miss Bradford said

he should take her as far as Comely Place, and she would walk home, after a brief call upon Margaret Chamberlain.

"And you will come, of course, Doris?" her father added.

"No, papa—please."

"What! A young lady's convenient headache, because Margaret Chamberlain is in the question?"

"No, papa, I have no headache," said Doris, honestly, though her white face would have verified any such excuse; "I only just feel inclined to walk about near home. I shall be sure to go to meet Aunt Joan presently. No, I have no headache, papa; I seldom have, you know."

She waited to watch the carriage drive away, and Miss Joan answered her nod and smile, and repressed a little sigh.

"I'll bring her home a present," observed Colonel Egerton, apparently convinced as to the only efficient panacea for pale face and wistful eyes.

Down the Larch Walk and to the bridge, went Doris, looking around her and before her; searching every nook in the landscape, in the fast-decreasing hope of seeing the form she

longed to see. Before crossing the river, she had lingered a few minutes, stooping to gather one tiny frond of fern which peeped from a little sheltered spot beside the bridge, and longing that Scot might come and find her, here on her own side of the stream. But no—there was still no sign of him; and now she went on a little more hastily, in a new panic lest he should have left home after he and her father had separated in the morning.

The dusk was gathering as if from the four quarters of the sky at once, when Doris was taken into the dining-room at the Black Birches, to find it empty and chill. The fire was quenched, with one huge block of coal and a sloping mountain of black dust, which tended decidedly more to economy than to idle voluptuousness; and one of the windows stood open in a manner which might be conducive to health, though certainly not to luxury, upon a Winter afternoon.

Doris shuddered, yet it was not from the cold, for she chose her seat beside the open window. It was perhaps a vague mental protest against the thought of bringing a fresh anxiety here where—— The opening of the

door behind her snapped this slight, dark thread of thought.

"Miss Egerton, you should not have been brought here," said Miss Windish, closing her small limp fingers round Doris's; "I have been busy with my poultry—I am trying maize for them, as they did not fatten sufficiently on oats—and I am having a fire put in the other room, thinking Scot would like it, because it is his birthday to-day."

"His birthday!"

Miss Michal noticed nothing in the tone beyond its surprise—nothing of the sorrow the girl felt at having brought her warning to Scot upon this birthday which could, even in any case, have so little mirth and festivity.

"Yes, his birthday," repeated Miss Michal, pensively. "He is twenty-nine to-day. It used to be a great day at Kingswood; but, though I've had a fire in the other room—which we don't make a rule of having, except on Sundays—I couldn't think of anything else to make the day unusual, my dear. Ah!" It was well Miss Windish did not pause in her little questioning parlance to note its effect upon Doris. "Ah! that is actually an atom of osmunda—

a poor bit, but there's no doubt about it; and you brought it to-day, that's fortunate. A frond of osmunda put over the door brings good luck to a house; but you know that, of course?"

"No, I didn't know," said Doris, not so ready as usual to smile at the little lady's superstition, while she bent eagerly over the fern. "I'm very glad I brought it, if it be so."

"How are we to put it up?" questioned Miss Michal, holding her head thoughtfully on one side. "Elizabeth is about as short as I am, and so is Liath."

"Let me try," said Doris, brightly; "not because I am very tall, but I can reach perhaps—on a chair on tiptoe."

She had not even yet been able to ask for Scot; and this new path for her thoughts was a kind of respite between the shock of hearing this day was to be a festival at the old farm, and the approaching shock of her tidings to him.

So a chair stood in the open doorway, and a girl stood on her toes upon this chair, her arms and head raised, and her whole attention engrossed by something at the top of the door, when Scot came up to the step.

And while Doris descended very slowly, and stopped to wipe the dust from her hand before she offered it to him, he wondered a little how that slight exertion could so entirely have robbed her cheeks of their soft, bright colour.

It was his birthday! For a few minutes Doris could forget everything but that, and her good wishes were so bright as well as earnest, and his reception of them was so frank and pleasant, that soon there followed merry words, and even laughter, in the little group.

It was just as the one haunting thought of what she had to do, fell again with its heavy weight upon the girl's mind, that a tiny rustle broke the silence, and down from its post above the door, touching Scot's shoulder as it passed, fell the fern.

"Will that tumble be disastrous in its consequences, Aunt Michal?" inquired Scot, laughing, as he picked it up and mounted to replace it. "Or is it merely the effect of my disbelief in its magic?"

"Mr. Monkton," said Doris, with a sudden thought which surprised even herself, as she stood beside the chair and looked up into his face—in her great earnestness laying a detain-

ing hand upon his arm—"please let me put it back. If you had not come in at that moment, I should have made it safe."

"Now," she said, when he had held the chair for her, and had taken her hand while she stepped down, "will you, in return, come and get me a frond? I saw another root at the bridge, but I could not reach it. Will you?"

How could he help taking it as a joke—he, with his sturdy scorn of superstition, and his keenness to read her own amused wonder at it? But, in his innate courtesy, he was at her service even in a jest.

"You will not really put it above your own door?" he asked, as they walked down the garden together, while Miss Michal, relieved at having paved the way for the entrance of that capricious dame who turns the wheels of affairs, was able to dedicate her mind to fires.

Doris did not answer; indeed, she had not spoken one word, when they reached the other side of the river, and Scot had brought her the fern from a little nook which was sheltered from every wintry breath. She took it, still without a word, leaning against the corner of the bridge, and a minute afterwards, not knowing what she

did, she had dropped it, and her hands were clasped as they hung down before her.

"I—I want to speak to you, Mr. Monkton. I want to say something very urgently and anxiously."

Dusk though it was, she—watching so wistfully—could see the look of patient quietness which fell upon his face in preparation for what she might say to him; but nothing could she understand of the suppressed yearning which battled with that patient quietness.

"You will be surprised," she said, trying to speak easily and brightly, "at what I ask of you, because I cannot explain why I ask it; but when I remember how good you were to me yesterday, I have courage to ask you to be good to me to-day."

If, instead of longing to make easy for him the task of listening and following her meaning, she had tried to make it hard, she could but have chosen those very words.

"Whatever it is," he said, in the quietness of real pain, "I will do it."

The eagerness and gladness of her thanks were the result of her long previous excitement, but of course he knew nothing of that.

"You have promised," she said; "you remember that you have promised, Mr. Monkton?"

"Indeed I do."

"Then to-night, at dark, will you have men—help—you understand what I mean. Oh! please try to understand—and watch at the Green Pits?"

What wonder was it that his laugh rang out so merrily in that first moment? And who could ever tell what the relief was to him to find that his given promise touched only himself?

"Mr. Monkton," she cried, with a catching in her breath, "it is not a jest. Oh, please don't laugh, or you will never be really prepared!"

"I am prepared now, Miss Egerton. Please tell me more."

The laugh had been but momentary, and the ready promptitude and fearlessness were habitual.

"Will you take men," entreated Doris, putting foremost this addition to Anna Wakeley's request, which her own intense anxiety dictated, "and watch in the Green Pits to-night—all night?"

“Why?”

“Ah, I cannot tell you why!” she sighed. “I do not know.”

“Some folly has been repeated to alarm you, I fear, Miss Egerton,” said Scot, tranquilly. “Don’t believe a word of it, please. It is some nonsense originated by Wakeley, or by that Frenchman who is with him now. What can they do about here to-night? Wakeley is too experienced a poacher to look for game at the Green Pits, and Sourdets too experienced a villain to look for *me* there—after dark.”

“Oh, Mr. Monkton,” cried Doris, in a new access of fear at his words, “don’t smile over it;—don’t treat it as nonsense, or even as a false alarm. Indeed—indeed I never spoke more in earnest in my life, nor did the person who told me, and who bound me over to secrecy.”

“Bound you to secrecy?” questioned Scot, thoughtfully.

“Yes; and it is that which makes it so hard to speak at all, and so doubly hard to make you believe me.”

There was a little pause, and then Scot spoke as earnestly as she had done, though without a shade of fear, or even of uncertainty.

"I see," he said; "you would not have consented to this secrecy, or to do this task yourself, if you had not seen it would benefit some one. And only Anna Wakeley could have warned you—Do not start; the river cannot repeat my words, and report them to her brute of a husband, or his traitor of a friend, and there was no promise made as to my guessing. It was cruel of Anna to go to you with this needless alarm—very cruel; but I suppose she did it for the best, poor thing? It's rather hard sometimes to know what is best in an emergency; and what can she do in her dread? I don't know how I can thank you, Miss Egerton, for your kind fulfilment of the promise. It may have been harder for you even than I guess, for I know you would not shrink from it in any case. Now will you let me see you safely home—quickly too, as it is going to be a wet evening?"

Scot spoke quite easily, and Doris, as she walked beside him up the Larch Walk, listening to his pleasant desultory chat, grew to fancy that her fears had been exaggerated just a little perhaps, and that Scot Monkton was always coolly on his guard, and quite sufficiently arm-

ed against malice or ferocity by his own courage. Yet, when they stood to separate, in the gathering dusk, all her fears rushed back upon her—not that she would again give utterance to them, either to sadden or annoy him. She only asked, pleading both with look and tone—

“You will not go alone to the Green Pits, Mr. Monkton? You will remember that you have promised to have companions in your watch? Would not the police——”

“Fine fellows,” said Scot, with his cheery laugh, “but unnecessarily fine for this occasion. We will manage it without the police, Miss Egerton.”

“But you will be cautious?” she urged, her own gravity too deep to be disturbed. “I know I seem very cowardly, but isn’t it sometimes rash even to be courageous? May not circumstances make even bravery unwise?”

“I will remember,” said Scot, quite lightly. “I will remember every word you have said, Miss Egerton. Please run into the house, for here comes the rain in earnest.”

Of course Doris begged him to come in for shelter; but she knew that to-day, for the first time, the words were a mere form, as she was

thoroughly anxious for him to be at home. Her fear for him had none of that cowardice which would have tempted him to stay with her.

“But,” she said to herself, softly, as—in spite of the rain—she went quite slowly through the shrubbery, “I shall send Fowles to-night on some message to Miss Windish, and he shall take Lloyd, as if for company; and I shall beg papa to go, when he comes home; and I——”

But the thought was finished only by one long, pleading gaze up through the grey of the evening sky.

And all the time she heard Scot whistling cheerily, as he went down the Larch Walk in the rain.

Miss Bradford had reached home before the rain set in—Margaret Chamberlain having been out when she arrived at Comely Place—and so she took no very keen interest in the subject of the weather; rain being, as a rule, a topic which either touches us very nearly—through soaked garments and delayed enjoyment—or leaves us in a supreme indifference, occasionally spiced a little by self-gratulation touching our easy-chair by the fire. But to Doris this rain seemed a matter of intense personal interest.

So restlessly she wandered about the house, backwards and forwards between the drawing-room and one of those upper windows which looked beyond the Larch Walk, that her aunt's tone of astonishment grew at last gently reproachful.

"Yes; I *am* very idle and restless, Aunt Joan," the girl said, gently, stopping at her side; "and I wish I could help feeling fascinated to look out into this dismally wet night. Shall I play to you, Auntie, or read?"

But presently she would lay down her book or leave the piano, and, standing in the dark again, at that high unshuttered window, would pierce the darkness, and see in fancy that room at the Black Birches where Miss Michal sat and fretted for Scot, while he spent this night (which was to have been a festival) in watching out-of-doors in the wet and cold and darkness.

"But I am a girl," said Doris once, shaking her head as if she would have shaken off these haunting thoughts; "it is different for him."

"Well, Doris?"

"Well, Auntie," she answered, bravely, as

she re-entered the room and met Miss Joan's quizzical question, "I see no difference since I went last. The rain beats against the windows, and the river is high and rapid, and the larches bend in their slow, ghostly way, and the wind——"

"There's your papa!" interrupted Miss Joan "I hear the wheels."

But the carriage had come home empty, with a note from Colonel Egerton, who was staying at Minton all night. Doris felt the tears overflow her eyes as she read it.

"Doris, my dear," said Miss Joan, "it is very late; read me a chapter, and let us go to bed."

Doris, struggling bravely with her nervousness, had still a tremor in her voice as she read the grand, calm words; and the lips which Miss Joan kissed so tenderly, had just then lost their healthy redness.

Doris's own room was so bright with fire and candlelight that she turned away from it, and stood once more in the dark, before that window on the stairs. The wind came shrilly through the woods, bending the leafless boughs; and, passing down the valley, wrinkled the swollen river. For a few minutes Doris opened the

window and leaned through, the rain blinding her as she tried to fix her eyes steadily upon that one blurred and misty spot of light down at the Black Birches, and to picture who was in the room behind, and who was out in the rain and darkness, watching for a vague something which perhaps could *never* be grasped and grappled with.

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT spot of light upon which Doris gazed through the falling rain, was the wide unshuttered window of the kitchen at the Black Birches. True the lamp and fire still burned in the drawing-room, but the shutters and curtains hid their light from Doris, while the acute consciousness of the failure of her birthday schemes metaphorically hid it too from Miss Michal. What was the pleasure of sitting alone and anxious, even in the best room in the house, while the one for whom the room had been prepared chose to spend the night out-of-doors, "catching his death" as fast as he could? "As if he could not have chosen another day to go mad upon!"

Miss Michal had offered herself this suggestion twenty times since midnight, and yet she would not go to bed, or even let the birthday fire die.

Wandering between the lonely drawing-room and the huge faggot fire in the kitchen, she found some little relief in these mutterings; while Elizabeth—obediently replenishing the kitchen fire—was lost in wonderment at her mistress's new and mysterious indifference to the waste of coal and wood.

“Do you wish to go to bed, Elizabeth?” inquired Miss Michal, standing on the hearth; while the light danced upon her small black person and her extended palms, and did its best to bring a tinge of colour into her little pensive face.

“No, ma'am; I shan't for anything go to bed and leave you up, and the master and Liath out—no, not for anything.”

Even this girl could see Miss Michal's greater fitness for receiving than bestowing protection, and, in spite of the little lady's sighs and petulance and unlimited vagaries, some qualities—which Elizabeth, like others, felt without comprehending—drew her, as it had drawn others, to guard Miss Michal.

“Throw more wood on, Elizabeth. How far do you think the light reaches from this window?”

"Not far, ma'am, because of the rising ground and the stacks. But up at the Dower House, from the top windows, they'd see."

"They can see it from the Green Pits, though?"

"Oh, yes, 'em, of course."

"Of course," ruminated Miss Michal, turning up the skirt of her dress, and looking at the window, where she could see nothing but waves of light upon the panes; "of course."

"It's strange that master and Liath should both be bent on staying out to-night, ma'am, isn't it?"

"Strange?" ejaculated Miss Michal, with an attack of irrepressible energy. "It's lunatic!"

"Elizabeth—" after a pause—"put the kettle on; your master must have something hot. So must Liath, if he has the sense to come in for it, stupid as he is. Bless the girl! Don't put it here, quenching the flame and the light. Take it to the drawing-room fire. It won't inconvenience anybody there."

And then it was odd to see how cunningly Miss Michal waited for the maid's absence before she would venture to push the poker into the fire—already glowing and crackling and

blazing—because she had a nervous consciousness that the action was totally at variance with her usual practice, and with her strictly enforced lessons to her servant.

“There,” she murmured, with complacence, when she had scientifically replaced the poker without a sound, breathing hard herself the while, as we generally do when engaged on any task of supernatural silence; “surely that must attract him in. If it doesn’t”—with an access of vivacity—“he must be madder even than I think.”

Apparently Scot was not madder in reality than in Miss Michal’s thoughts, for, two or three minutes after she had filled the kitchen with the beautiful restless light, the outer door at the back of the room was opened, and he came in; standing to close the door behind him as noiselessly as he had opened it.

“Good gracious!” cried Miss Michal—and evidently these two words expressed all she felt it necessary to express, for after their utterance she relapsed into an injured, firelit Niobe.

“What a blaze, Aunt Michal!” Scot said, with the greatest ease. “This welcomes a fellow splendidly; and yet I have come to ask you

to let me put it out, or screen the window."

"Do what you like, Scot," observed Miss Michal, plunged into extreme melancholy.

"See," said Scot, reading, in this new extravagance and wakefulness all her kind motives and her real anxiety for him, "I can close the shutters, and stop the gaps with pastry boards and other trifles, and let the fire alone. It's very jolly, Aunt Michal."

And when he had finished his work at the window, and had made sure that through no crevice could the light creep into the outer night, he came and stood upon the hearth, and looked as if he thoroughly enjoyed it, and as if it might be one hour past mid-day instead of an hour past midnight.

"At last you've returned to your senses, then?" questioned Miss Windish. "And where's that ridiculous Liath?"

"Liath is in the stack-yard, and I'm going back to him in a minute."

"Oh," murmured Miss Michal, struggling beneath her injuries, "I might have expected that! I don't see why anything should ever surprise me in *this* house. I ought to be used to everything now."

"Don't get used to everything, Aunt Michal ; life is so dull without its surprises."

She looked up at him as he spoke, and a smile came trespassing into her face ; but in an instant it had darted away again, as if enjoying a game of Tom Tiddler's Ground with the firelight.

"You look," she said, "like a Norwegian setting out for the fiord. I remember in Norway, when we——"

This abrupt pause was so very evidently a painful one for Miss Michal, that Scot hastened to fill it in.

"It's a snug costume for this weather, Aunt Michal," he said, his shrewd, handsome face half covered by the sealskin cap with its long ears, and his brown beard wet with rain. "You've no idea how comfortable I am."

"Oh, yes, I've an idea," asserted the little lady, with gathering vehemence ; "else would you be insane enough to choose this sort of lively night to spend with a servant-man among the ricks and the rats ? But that I know there can be no reason in creation, I should ask what your reason could be."

"I cannot possibly tell you till to-morrow, Aunt Michal. I do not even know myself."

"So likely," observed Miss Michal, shaking her head; "so very probable."

"It does not sound very probable, I own, but it is intensely true. Now, Aunt Michal, do go to bed. Let me feel you are comfortably asleep."

"Is this to be a regular habit now, Scot?" inquired Miss Michal, pathetically. "Do you mean to spend all your nights out of doors?"

"Not quite," returned Scot, still cheerfully; "only to-night, I hope."

"I don't see that hoping has much effect, for I've hoped for hours that you'd come back to your senses."

"And here I am."

Just then Elizabeth came in to say that the water boiled, and Miss Windish turned to ask Scot what he would take warm.

"Coffee would be the best, of course," she observed, resignedly, "but I daresay you would rather have negus, or spirits."

"Aunt Michal," he said, touched by the little lady's thought for him, "what a brick you are! Give me something for Liath, please. Poor old fellow! he's doing his duty with a rare wide-awakeness."

"Oh yes, of course; and you're asleep in a

warm bed, and forget *your* duty, and want nothing—oh, of course.”

After which little ebullition of genial wrath, Miss Michal became brisk and active, and brewed such a jug of coffee for Liath (while Scot took his) as made the old man quite approve of turning night into day.

Again Miss Windish and Elizabeth were left alone in the house, and, in spite of little variations of spleen and sorrow, tears and invective, the small hours crawled past them wearily, and brought no change; until the inaction and suspense became unendurable to Miss Michal. She threw a waterproof over her shoulders, and opened the back door, sending a feeble call out into the wet and heavy darkness. The frail sound travelled just a yard or two, and then merged helplessly into the greater sounds.

“I’m going,” she said, looking back into the room, after waiting vainly for an answer to her call, her mind now evidently braced to an act of heroism. “Get me an umbrella, Elizabeth, and my goloshes.”

“Hadn’t I better come, ma’am, to carry it, and to help you along?”

"No," returned Miss Michal, heroically; "take care of the house. How do we know what thieves may not be about?" And, with this cheering thought for the girl who was to be left behind alone, Miss Michal emerged into the night, defiantly wielding her umbrella against the elements, and raising juicy sounds with her goloshes, as she struggled on to the Green Pits; feeling it incumbent on her to give expression to her feelings by means of groans, and calls, and other varied ejaculations; so that, even through the regular, monotonous noise of the wind and rain, Miss Michal's transit could be no secret.

"Oh! good gracious!"

The shrill exclamation pierced the wet atmosphere, and Miss Michal made a dead pause, her feet sinking gradually into the soil as she stood, and a circular fountain of rain falling round her already soaked umbrella.

"Scot," she called, "is it you? Oh, it's you, then, Liath, is it? Why don't you speak? How stupid you are, hurrying on in that way! Just as if," she added, gloomily, to herself—"I'd come out to kill them!—Scot" (raising her tone), "it's only me."

"Miss Windy," said Liath's whispering voice, as his small, dark figure came silently from the opposite direction, "what is it?"

"Liath!"—Miss Michal literally shrieked his name, in her relief—"it's you, is it? Then that was your master. Where's he gone?"

"Master's 'bout at the Green Pits somewhere, Miss. Hadna you better go 'ome?"

"I want to see your master," rejoined Miss Michal, with a loftiness which, in her condition and surroundings, it was a great merit to be able to maintain.

"You'll have a deal o' work to do that to-night, Miss Windy," replied Liath, still in a whisper. "What with the dark, and what with his quietness, e's out o' sight entire. And wouldna he be vexed, miss, if he see'd you 'ere?"

"Liath, you are always impertinent," observed Miss Windish, not quite sure which of her accumulated misfortunes pressed upon her most heavily just then; "I am never surprised by it—never."

"I'll see you back, miss, please," observed Liath, apparently not moved by this reflection.

It was by no means easy to sustain her

haughty bearing under such very trying circumstances; but to the best of her power Miss Michal *did* sustain it during her progress back to the house.

"Tell your master," she said then, with the meekest little failure in her attempt at sternness, as she took her dripping umbrella from Liath, and allowed him to leave her on the doorstep, "that I want him."

"Yes, miss," returned Liath, decorously.

Shivering and sobbing, Miss Michal stood before the kitchen fire again, turning the shining boards into a map of oceans, lakes, and rivers, while it was difficult to discern which were tears and which was rain upon her cheeks; for Miss Windish had, by nature, as innate a horror of wet and mud as a sleek little fireside cat.

Elizabeth had fallen so soundly asleep that even her mistress's entrance had not roused her, nor could her mistress's sighs do so now. When the umbrella had been deposited in a distant recess to drip, the waterproof spread upon two chairs, and the goloshes carried beyond the influence of the fire, Miss Michal's mind was to a great extent relieved, and she poured herself a

cup of coffee. After its disappearance, still forbearing to wake her tired maid—though glancing at her once as if she would, if she could, by a look, rouse her to a sense of her neglected duty—she fetched her Bible and sat down. Then, laying the book open in her lap at a favourite psalm, she closed her eyes fast, and felt comfortable.

As various fleeting and delusive fancies, which turned chiefly on the fact of Scot's being buried under a corn-rick and Liath's dancing on it, visited Miss Michal during this recess, it is highly probable that her senses may have dozed; but, when the outer door at last was opened to admit Scot, she started up and remarked that she should never be able to sleep again as long as she lived, she did believe.

"Aunt Michal," said Scot, earnestly, as he came up to her, "what was it you said to Liath—when he found you at the Green Pits—about having heard a footstep? He has only just told me."

"I don't know why I came," mourned Miss Michal. "It was of no use. Liath is such a little stupid that he wouldn't stay and show me where you were, though it was your step of

course. I heard it quite plain ; though the wind and rain made such a noise, and I had to hold my umbrella so low over my ears."

"Were you quite sure of the step?" inquired Scot, with great seriousness.

"Sure ! Do you think my brain is softening ? Though I'm sure in such weather as this anybody's brain might soften."

"I'm very sorry you are so uncomfortable to-night, Aunt Michal," said Scot—and he could not hide the disappointment which made his voice stern—"but I'm still more sorry you were tempted out. It was at first the firelight here which made our watch useless ; and now your appearance, or the sound of your step or voice, has made the latter half of our watch unavailing. You evidently disturbed them."

"What !" she cried. "What horrible things did I disturb, Scot ?"

"You startled the man, or men, whom I wanted to catch—at least, I fully believe so. But never mind, Aunt Michal," added Scot, still, to her intense disappointment, not attempting to change his Norwegian appearance.

"Mind !" she echoed, with intense misery. "I won't. I'll try to enjoy a dark wet night."

in a yard full of rats. I'll try to like Liath's roughness."

"No, don't," put in Scot, his vigorous, short-lived anger dying in this atmosphere of weak feminine complaint. "It is over now, and you shall not have another such a night, if I can foresee and prevent it."

"I suppose," murmured Miss Michal, with what she considered to be cutting and piercing irony, "you are in a hurry to return to the Green Pits?"

"Yes, until dawn. Then I shall be ready to begin my day's work. I have a great deal to do."

"Oh, Scot, my dear"—little Miss Michal's tears balanced themselves on her puckered cheeks now, and her hand was laid on the wet macintosh with more of a caress than a shiver—"do go to bed."

"Not I," laughed Scot. "Hadn't you better wake Elizabeth and send her to bed? She will have time to get a good sleep, for Liath shall do her work here. And you will go, Aunt Michal? What shall I do if you knock yourself up?"

"It wouldn't much matter?" observed Miss

Michal—but there was an irrepressible note of cheerfulness in her complaint now—“Still I’m not going to knock myself up—if that is the correct term, my dear. I shall take a few winks here, and then I shall be all right, and so will Elizabeth; and you’ll find breakfast ready for you when you come in at dawn, and a good fire, and a change of dress, and—oh, Scot, I needn’t have been so frightened, because the night has nearly passed, and you’re not killed, and the house hasn’t fallen, and—all!”

That little word, ever so comprehensive, was unusually so as Miss Michal uttered it, and Scot smiled his entire comprehension.

“Hark!”

It was quite excusable in Miss Michal, after what she called “a night of horrors,” to start and cry out in terror when she heard that rap upon the outer door, though the rap was but a quiet and somewhat timid one.

“Don’t go, Scot!” she cried, seizing him by the arm. “Oh! it’s awful the way you do rush into every danger you can find! I—I——”

The sentence could be finished only by a gasp, because Scot had advanced to open the

door in the face of danger. So Miss Michal gasped, and backed as far as the kitchen would allow her, covering her eyes, while she waited for the masked murderers to demolish Scot, and to advance to put a tragic end to her. This was why she did not see what Scot saw, when he opened the door and let the wind and rain beat in, while a low whisper passed his lips—

“Margaret !”

She was standing out in the wet and cold and darkness, very still in her long cloak, with its close hood over her head ; yet, when the firelight reached and fell upon her face, Scot saw a great terror there. And still, instead of drawing her into the warmth and light, he went out to her, and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE dawn had only just broken in the east, when Doris stood, dressed, at that upper window from which, the night before, she had so anxiously watched the light at the Black Birches; and as the grey line widened, and she could see the old farm, a little of the great heaviness of the night before was lifted from her heart. Yet she stood and waited, hardly knowing for what she waited—certainly never confessing it to herself—until the confession was made unconsciously, by her long breath of relief, when she saw a figure walking along that little pathway by the river, which led from the farm to Comely Place, and which had been worn in the grass chiefly by Steven Chamberlain and Scot Monkton. Doris never wondered why Mr. Monkton should be coming from

Comely Place in this first glow of the Winter daylight; she felt nothing beyond her intense relief at seeing him.

He was at a distance when she first caught sight of him, and, though his step was firm and quick as usual, he was evidently deep in thought. But this thought was, for a time, to be shared by no one, for the reason of Margaret Chamberlain's visit to the Black Birches the night before was a secret, at present, safe in Scot's honourable keeping. The day had dawned fairly after the tempestuous night, and the scene was made beautiful by the purple beams upon the hills. So Doris had thought, in her first relief at seeing the old farm and its master; but now she fancied that that night had, in some way, been harder and longer to him even than she had feared. So, only a few minutes after the thought had framed itself, she was standing at the shrubbery gate, just where he could see her as he came into the Larch Walk.

He had his macintosh over his arm now, and wore only the short, closely-buttoned coat, with its fur collar and cuffs, which, with the high dragoon boots, had reminded Miss Michal

of some unrecalled period of Norwegian experience; and he came towards her over the wet grass, his step quick and resolute, and strength and vigour in every movement. Yet, when he reached her, and she offered him her hand, she was sure that she had been right, and that the night had tried something beyond his strength—for how could Doris guess that it was this very meeting from which he shrank in the new-born hope of the morning?

“I am so glad to see you, Mr. Monkton!”

Doris had never thought of what she should say to him, when she had hastened out to meet him; it had been done without premeditation, in the real gratitude of her heart. And even now it never struck her that he would not understand, without one word of explanation, her joy at this night's having passed him harmlessly by, and her wish to tell him so. And he did understand it all; yet he only just pressed for a moment the hand she gave him, and answered cheerily that he had done as she had bidden him, all through the darkness, and yet was here to tell the tale.

Then his eyes, which had only for a moment rested on her face, went down to the old farm,

and he added, lightly, that his grain was left to him too.

"I am so glad," said Doris again, her words but meagre interpreters of her thoughts.

He raised his cap then, and they turned their separate ways, neither of them glancing back. But, even from those very few and very insignificant words, one at least felt a little happier and brighter.

Scot had—as he had told Miss Windish in the night—a very busy day before him; and she did not see him after their early breakfast until, startled by the unexpected appearance of Mr. Bradford, she sent to summon him in, wherever he might be—in consequence of which order, Scot came in before the darkness obliged him, and met Mr. Bradford just as courteously as he could have done at Kingswood.

"Well," said the old lawyer, eyeing him quizzically, "you aren't tired of it then—even yet?"

"No."

"That's an easy word to say; but who is to believe it when your voice belies the word? You are not only tired of this cramped life, but you are also convinced at last, if you have the

sense with which I credit you, that it is unnecessary."

"You have credited me with too much sense," laughed Scot, his tone unquestionably cheerful now, as he drew an arm-chair to the fire for his old friend. "I'm convinced of nothing, except that I am glad to see you."

"Rubbish!" retorted the old lawyer, with a suspicious haste and effort in his petulance. "Let me find you less absurd and Quixotic, for Heaven's sake! Take what is your own, and let this vast amount of folly go to the deuce—its fitting quarters."

"Please don't imagine mine a martyr's existence here," said Scot, with a ready cheerfulness which was as suspicious as was the lawyer's impatience. "I'm all right and comfortable. Is Kenneth at the Dower House?"

"No, I wish he were. He's fast in that city den of his, deep in the old intoxication."

"Not cured quite yet?" questioned Scot, gently—It was always with rare gentleness that he spoke now of Kenneth Bradford.

"Cured!" cried Mr. Bradford, his eyes sparkling with a pride which even his real petulance or mortification would not hide. "Nobody

was ever cured of intoxication. You ought to know enough of life to know that."

"I knew a cure once," said Scot, "in the very man who left me this farm. His favourite child toppled over into a vat of boiling beer, and he never touched it afterwards."

"That was no cure, for who could bear the taste of his child's poison? No, I'll defy you to cite me a real cure."

"But your son's intoxication is not——"

"Not caused by beer—no, nor by brandy. But beer and brandy are but trifles in their effect compared with *his* intoxicating spirit."

"I suppose his new drama is nearly completed now?"

"I don't know," returned the lawyer, as moodily as Scot had ever heard him speak. "If you listen to him one day, you suppose it to be ready and a grand success, as Doris thinks; on the next, you begin to think it a failure, to be torn up in abject despair, as Joan thinks. *I* never listen."

"I see," said Scot, with a laugh; "'while some believed it never would be finished, some on the contrary believed it would!'"

"More good lawyers," interposed Mr. Brad-

ford, testily, "have been ruined by rhythm on the brain than by losing cases."

"But the ruined lawyers have made good poets," said Scot, in his pleasant way. "Just think what a list we could make of lawyers who developed into poets—Petrarch and Metastasio; Schiller, Goethe, and Heine; Corneille and Voltaire; not to mention our own countless poets, Chaucer, Milton, Cowper, Moore, Scott, Campbell, Gray, Longfellow, and a dozen others. I daresay old Wordsworth tried to make his son a lawyer, like himself, yet he only turned him out a Laureate after all."

"Pish!" snapped Mr. Bradford, very hastily. "You always argue for the absent,—an unmanly proceeding, sir. And what do you pretend to know about the subject, pray, when you are even ignorant of the very A B C of law and equity, as regards landed property? Even I would not object to a man indulging in rhymes and stage buffoonery as recreation, if he stuck honourably to his law—like Blackstone or, better still, Cicero; but, for justice sake, don't encourage lawyers to put anything before law—a fractious child, who will not prosper with a divided attention."

"I suppose, if your son cannot get a drama accepted, or gets it accepted and it fails, that will be the blow which will throw him back upon his profession."

"I fail to see his future intentions," said the old lawyer, with an unusual heaviness in his tone, "and I think he never sees them himself. On the success of his play depends the success of all his life, if you are to believe him. Even his wife is only to be won in the hour of his possible triumph, and not without it."

"I see," said Scot, in that quiet voice of his which betrayed his intense earnestness. "I hope with all my heart he will succeed."

And in a few minutes he had broken, in just his usual voice, the rather inexplicable pause which followed his speech.

"I was sorry to hear from Doctor Boyd that you had been troubled with your old enemy the gout. It must have been bad indeed to have tempted you to call him in, hating doctoring as you do."

"Yes; I called him in, as you say," returned the lawyer, tranquilly. "I had grown meek with pain. 'Do what you like with me, doctor,'

said I, 'only don't give me medicine; and, for pity's sake, don't diet me!'"

"A very submissive and hopeful patient," laughed Scot; "one who gives a physician a fair chance indeed."

"Yes, I let him advise me, and—it did him good."

"I was glad to see Miss Windish looking so well and cheerful," resumed Mr. Bradford, presently, in a tone which was too easy, and too full of suppressed amusement, to betray its hidden motive. "When I arrived, she had just come in, leading a man with a truck and a chest of drawers."

"Had she?" questioned Scot, with a laugh which was utterly frank and hearty. "She had been to a sale, then. I did not know, as I've been out all day."

"Has she?"—the lawyer turned his face aside as he asked the question, and looked from the window, moving his head as if interested in something outside which evaded his gaze—"any fortune of her own?"

"Fortune? Of course not, Mr. Bradford."

"Why of course not?"

"I don't know; only of course she has not."

"She never told you, I suppose, and you never asked? Oh, what a matchless lawyer you would have made! Does she ever mention her husband?"

"Never!"

"Humph! It's the most curious thing that ever escaped a court of justice. Luke Hawthorne was a capital fellow—get him out of his engineering mania—and she——"

"I don't know what I should do without Aunt Michal," said Scot, interposing in his simple, manly loyalty.

"Catch you blaming the woman's side! But for Luke Hawthorne to stay away and send no word (as well as Arthur Egerton having done exactly the same) is one of the few things that puzzle T. & C. Bradford. I would go into it in earnest, only I've so much to do just now."

"Then I doubly feel your kindness in coming down here," said Scot, earnestly.

"Pooh! pooh! I'm an idiot to come at all! Of what use is it? I only go back with a lively picture of my old client's son slaving on this despicable soil, while the finest estate in England is left to the rats. It's more," concluded the old lawyer, running his fingers through his thick

joyment of the tidings, "he will be safe again for a month at least."

Scot glanced up in unfeigned surprise. Could Mr. Bradford be *afraid* of the freedom of an ignorant, dishonest boor like Wakeley?

"He has only just been discharged from gaol for robbing Aunt Michal's poultry-yard, and I had, a few weeks before, begged him off for poaching at Kingswood—somehow the offence does not seem quite the same to me, now I have no preserves of my own."

"Begged him off!" ejaculated Mr. Bradford, with snappish contempt. "Well, perhaps you will be wiser some day, and know when you are dealing with that animal with the long ears, who gives a kick at the bucket he has drunk out of. Mr. Monkton, saving your presence, what folly you commit!"

"I committed *him* that time."

"Well?" questioned the lawyer, presently, with his short snap of approbation. "And the farm is prospering, of course?"

"Of course."

"Coining money—are you?"

"I expect I should be," returned the young man, pleasantly, "only I happen to have lost so

much since I've been here. There were all those sheep killed by the dogs, and then the foot-and-mouth disease came, and now this severe Winter following the dry Summer makes fodder so scarce."

"Nevertheless," observed Mr. Bradford, dryly, "the enormous amount of practical experience you brought to bear on this remunerative farm, and the large capital you have to draw upon, quite compensate for these little natural drawbacks—eh?"

"If I had plenty of machinery here," continued Scot, reflectively, "I could make the land pay. I should like to have invested in a flock of Cotswolds; but Liath perpetually warns me——"

"Liath is a fool!" put in Mr. Bradford, cheerfully. "Go in for Cotswolds, and all the machinery and inventions of the age, with every other folly you can think of. Never mind the little giant's qualms about debts. Build them up all around you, and as high as you like; then we shall have a chance of seeing you back at Kingswood, and in your right mind."

After this speech, a silence fell upon the two friends, and it was only broken by the entrance

of Miss Windish, and announcement of dinner. Not for any temptation would Mr. Bradford shorten one of his rare visits to the Black Birches. His calls at the Dower House might be interrupted or hurried over, but never here; especially when—as now—he could see on young Monkton's face a fear, comically leavened with amusement, that the coming meal would make the shrewd old lawyer fume more than ever over this enforced life of his client. With all his bluffness, Mr. Bradford was too innately courteous, and too really fond of Scot, not to see, as well as make the best of everything he did in such a case as this, though so anxious to use every sign of poverty to serve his own purpose.

“Well, Miss Windish,” he began, helping himself cheerfully to the dish before him, and as genial just now as Scot himself could be, “how about that chest of drawers?”

Thus encouraged, Miss Michal willingly poured into a willing ear her late experience in bargains, and Mr. Bradford received the intelligence with a most unusual display of urbanity.

So the evening passed off pleasantly, and it was almost midnight before Mr. Bradford ap-

peared at the Dower House, where his coming was expected, and where everyone was sitting up for him—"even Doris," as he exclaimed, tapping her gently on the cheek, when she slipped her hand through his arm in the hall.

"We've had Mr. Levey here all the evening," put in Colonel Egerton, wondering a little why his daughter should have blushed so readily at her old friend's surprise at seeing her up—for how could he guess that real anxiety had kept her to see Mr. Bradford on his return from the Black Birches?

"Levey! You are learning to value him, I hope. I once saw an ancestor of his buy a bit of old gold from a poor woman who had very little to sell. I never saw anything so clever in my life as the way he *whistled* down the scale. Ah, he was an adroit old rogue, and grew rich upon his rich devices. His descendant, my dear, is a man to be admired; but"—was he not already as another father to her, and, next to Kenneth, was she not dearest to him in the world?—"don't teach him to admire our little girl—for Kenneth's sake."

"We expected you far earlier," put in Miss Joan. "How late you stayed at the Black Birches!"

"Yes," returned Mr. Bradford; and it was only by chance that his eyes fell on Doris as they two walked to the fireside. "I'm sorry not to have been earlier."

"I'm very glad," she said.

And somehow, though the laugh was against her, the old lawyer understood that the words were unusually earnest.

CHAPTER X.

TIME brought very few changes, until the new year was three weeks old, when Oliver Wakeley got his discharge, and began to fall into his old habit of prowling about the neighbourhood. Monsieur Philippe Sourdets had returned, now and then, to enjoy a day of Kingswood air from Wakeley's cottage; but had not yet felt that more than one day's change at a time would be desirable.

Scot Monkton had almost entirely given up visiting now. He worked at the farm untiringly, early and late; and, besides spending all his time and strength on the poor land which he could scarcely afford to enrich, he bestowed upon it a wealth of earnest and concentrated thought, with which he hoped to supply the deficiency of capital and experience.

His old friends looked in vain for him in idle hours; he seemed to have no idle hours—no idle minutes, even. He came into the house only when summoned, or when the darkness drove him. At his meals he had generally a book beside him, in which he read of crops, and cattle, and new discoveries or experiments. Even in his musings before the fire, Miss Michal saw that his thoughts were far from idle thoughts. Yet, for all this, he had ever his cheery sympathy to offer, and his help or interest in everything.

“If he had a nature that could possibly spoil,” Miss Michal would say, with a sigh, “it would be spoiled utterly, by all this slavery and denial, and by this absurd devotion to the ugliest occupation under the sun.”

And then she would drop a stray tear, and slip her hand into Scot's slippers, to feel if they were thoroughly warmed. Then she would look out for him, quite prepared to greet him with a catalogue of humble complaints if he came in cheerful, or showed any inclination to be prodigal in the matter of fire; but equally prepared to buzz about him like a low-spirited bluebottle if he were harassed or jaded, and—fatal proceeding ever in such a case—ask him

to "cheer up." She had no fear of an impatient reply, for he was always marvellously patient with her now; and it really did grieve her as much to see him dejected as to see him lavish with fuel.

So, when she heard his step in the hall to-night, she gave the fire an encouraging poke, though she had wheeled the coal-box out of sight; and she once more spasmodically examined his slippers, though she gathered a great distress the while into her small, pale features.

"Scot, I never in my life was so tired of waiting. Of course I have a good deal of it to do—no one could live with you and not have patience exercised in waiting; but"—with the meekest of sighs—"things get steadily worse every day."

"I think they do," said Scot, while his face was a little turned away; "four of the bullocks are sick now, Aunt Michal."

"Dear—dear—dear!" moaned Miss Michal. "What will be the end of it? And that osmunda was of no use, after all!"

"Has it faded or fallen, then?" asked Scot, with none of his old contempt for her superstition just now. "You must give it time, you know."

"So far everything has gone wrong."

"So far," rejoined Scot, with a tranquil composure; "but then 'so far' has reached its limits; and we've no idea what that osmunda is intending to do a little farther on."

"Yet you don't believe in it an atom," sighed Miss Michal, trying to hide the melancholy smile into which she had been deluded. "See, Scot, there is a paper crushed half into your pocket; you will be sure to lose it."

"The sooner the better," said Scot, and tossed it into the heart of the fire.

"What is it?" cried Miss Michal, startled more by the young man's expression than by what she fancied she had seen upon the paper.

"I suppose it's a Writ. Something of that sort, at any rate. If I don't pay Wessel's bill in—I forget how many days, I shall have—I forget the punishment too."

"Oh, how dreadful!" cried Miss Michal, foundering at once in the vague, troubled sea which rose round her at the mention of the unfamiliar legal instrument. "Oh, how terrible, Scot! What shall we do, my dear?"

"Our best," said Scot, gently separating her locked fingers.

"But with this awful doom over our heads—ready to fall!"

"Aunt Michal," interrupted Scot, laughing, as he took up his cornet, "there's an old Spanish proverb which says, 'In trouble to be troubled is to have your trouble doubled.'"

Little Miss Windish meditated a good deal over this proverb—as well as over the probable and terrible consequences of that burned document—while she sat ignoring her work during Scot's playing; but before she rose to leave him, she repeated anxiously the question which was fraught in her mind with such a weight of weal or woe.

"Scot, what shall you do? I wish you would try to form some decision."

"I decided hours ago," the young man answered, readily. "It's not much trouble for a man to decide when only one way lies before him, Aunt Michal."

"You mean," she asked, her breath very quick in her eager anticipation, "you will go back to Kingswood?"

"I mean that I must borrow the money, Aunt Michal."

The words were prompt, and even placid,

yet there had passed a look over the young man's face which betrayed the intense and concentrated anxiety which his words would never betray.

"From whom?" she questioned, with a new hopelessness in her persistency.

"Bradford, of course," he said, rather amused, it would seem, at there being any doubt about it. "To whom else could I go on such an errand?"

"Then you don't mind asking *him*?" she inquired, plaintively.

"Mind it!" he answered, in sudden heat, "I would rather labour day and night for a week without pausing, than do it; but"—with a coolness which never struck her as unusual—"it is the only thing I can do."

"Shall you write to-morrow, then?"

"No. Why trouble him unnecessarily early? Besides, I am tremendously busy now; and we don't know—any more than Mr. Micawber did—what may turn up. No, Aunt Michal, I shall wait a few days. Stay one moment. How does that old ballad go, for which I used to ask you so often when I was a lad? Sing it me, please, Aunt Michal. I want to recall the air."

Pleased with the request, Miss Michal sat upright in her chair, folded her hands in her lap, cleared her throat, and then, puckering her brows with the distressed expression which she considered essential to a song, she trolled out, in a little, mellow, plaintive voice, the half-forgotten song—

“ We met—’twas in a crowd.”

Scot sat and listened intently, his eyes upon the fire ; and, when Miss Michal’s performance was over, he raised his cornet to his lips and played the air through, easily and correctly. But when he began it again Miss Michal stopped him to say good-night, and hurried upstairs, wondering why the quaint familiar air had struck upon her ears so sadly. For an hour this inexplicable gloominess kept her awake, while the clear melodies crept up to her ; then Scot came up the stairs, softly whistling ; and (relieved by the familiar step and cheerful sound) she turned over on her pillow, and soon had won a blissful unconsciousness of every grievance.

For a few days the subject of Wessel’s bill was not mentioned between Miss Windish and Scot. She avoided it because she did not think

of anything new, and hoped that in the pause some great resolve would form itself in Scot's mind; and he avoided it simply because it was his nature to avoid all things disagreeable. The necessity for procuring the money was ever present with him, and his thoughts sought no escape from this necessity; but he had at once decided to take the only course which seemed open to him, and so, during the pause before he must send his request to Mr. Bradford, there was no need to make his aunt a sharer in the heaviness which he felt should be his alone.

The day had not yet come on which he had determined to write to his old lawyer, when one morning, to Miss Michal's intense astonishment, he came down to breakfast in his hunting-dress.

"At last you are going to take a day's pleasure, Scot," she sighed, as he met her astonished gaze. "You are coming to your senses gradually, are you?"

"Certainly, Aunt Michal, if that means that I'm coming to breakfast."

Pleased as Miss Windish was to see him opposite her, in the dress which suited so well

his firm, well-made figure and handsome face, she was a little puzzled by it too. Scot had been resolute in denying himself his hunting; had determinately ignored his old position; and decisively turned the subject aside when he had been laughed at, as too proud to follow without a couple of hunters in train, and one of the grand old Kingswood breakfasts before the start; yet now, when things were actually going against him more than ever, here he was with every evidence of intending to enjoy himself, his step light and soldierly, as she always used to think it at Kingswood.

“Why is it, Scot?” she faltered at last, holding her cup suspended as she gazed at him.

“You *do* look surprised, Aunt Michal,” he laughed. “I’m going on business. Porter says he dare not venture after the hounds on Vault-er, until I have tried him in the field. He sent him out here last night with that request, and I am going of course.”

“Major Porter is timid, then,” propounded Miss Michal, gravely—as of course how could she know this was a little *ruse* of the officer’s for getting his friend once more into the hunt-

ing field?—"and he is not afraid for you, I suppose?"

"For me!" laughed Scot. "Porter cannot be *afraid* for himself, but, of course, as he paid handsomely for the horse, and I undertook to break him——"

The speech was interrupted by the entrance of the letters, and Scot turned them over, just as he always did, quite ready to be surprised and pleased if there were anything unexpected or pleasant, and not at all ready to be depressed by such as he had lately learned to expect.

"None for you, I think, this morning, Aunt Michal."

He always made the remark, just as if she were accustomed on ordinary occasions to receive a large assortment; yet, except local bills and notes and circulars, no letters had ever arrived for her since her return to Kingswood, after her fifteen years' absence.

"What a long letter, Scot! And I don't know that red address, do I?" observed Miss Michal, gazing curiously, while she held out her hand for his empty cup, which he seemed to have forgotten.

"A most extraordinary coincidence," he said,

still reading on, the paper held in both hands, while his brows came down over his intent eyes.

"Is it about another debt?" questioned Miss Michal, naturally objecting to her present condition of ignorance.

"No; on the contrary, I believe it will relieve me from Wessel's," he answered, refolding the letter. "It has arrived very opportunely. I shall not need to bother Bradford about the money, after all. I see now how I can obtain it without any difficulty whatever."

"Do you?" inquired Miss Michal, mournfully. "And is it all right, Scot—and honest—and straightforward?"

"Why should it not be? But I shall go to town myself to make sure. At any rate, is it not lucky that it chanced to come just now? Would you care to read it, Aunt Michal?"

"No, no," she said, with a slow shake of her head. "I don't know anything about such matters, Scot. You know I don't. Indeed," she added, pathetically, "I don't see how you are to do so either. Just tell me of it—that's all."

"It is a letter from a gentleman who is willing

to lend small sums of money—from fifty to a hundred pounds—to gentlemen who are temporarily inconvenienced by debt. He requires no security beyond a note of hand,” continued the young man, just quietly stating what he thought to be a fact, “and only a very moderate interest.”

“Then persons do that sort of thing sometimes out of pure benevolence,” suggested Miss Michal, without the faintest note of scepticism.

“I suppose they do. After all, it seems rather a natural and comfortable idea, for an old gentleman—of course he’s old—to devote a little of his riches to benefit those who are often in sorer straits than regular paupers. No doubt he is cautious only to lend where his money is safe. I shall run up to town to-night, Aunt Michal,” Scot continued, putting the folded letter into his desk as he rose. “Have you any commissions?”

“To-night,” murmured Miss Michal, disconsolately. “Won’t to-morrow do?”

“It would lose me a day. Why should I wait?”

“Because this is the seventh of February,

and you know—at least, you would, if you were not so careless about these things—that the first and seventh of every month are invariably unlucky days.”

“For somebody, of course, they are ; and so are the second and eighth, and the third and ninth, and the fourth and tenth—eh, Aunt Michal?”

“Don’t laugh about it,” urged Miss Michal, with great anxiety. “If you *will* choose an unlucky day, pray don’t laugh about the choice ; it is so hardened of you !”

He was not laughing, when she stood and watched him ride from the door ; but his face was as full of brave and easy courage to meet what was to come, as if he had known what a tremendous stake hung upon this day’s decision. And Miss Michal sat down and cried.

CHAPTER XI.

THE hounds met that day within a stone's throw of Comely Place, yet neither Mr. nor Miss Chamberlain was in the gay crowd. Doris Egerton, sitting beside her father in his phaeton, in her soft white furs, glanced at the red gables beyond the shrubbery, and then asked a question mutely, as her eyes came back to her father's face. He shook his head, understanding what puzzled her.

"Cannot say, dear. If the hounds met upon their very lawn, I don't think we should see them there. I suppose Chamberlain is too much of a bookworm, and Margaret too—sensible, shall we say?"

"Not riding, Miss Egerton!" exclaimed Rose Levey, coming up to them on her sleek, tall horse. "Have you actually never ridden since your accident?"

"Not yet," said Doris, with a soft, bright blush.

"But you will, of course? Bernard always holds you up to us as a model of what a lady should look on horseback."

"If I had been a good horsewoman, I think I should have had no accident," said Doris, simply.

"What a disappointment, Miss Egerton!" cried Bernard Levey, riding up to the phaeton, on Doris's side. "We expected you to follow to-day. We are anticipating a splendid run. See, the anticipation has even tempted Mr. Monkton out, for the first time this season."

"I see," said Doris, with that gracious little nod of hers, which was no matter of education, but an outbreak of her own inherent pleasantness; and her eyes, straight and clear and bright, were fixed on the horseman who had just ridden up to the group.

But a distant glance, however bright, was not enough for Rose Levey, and before Doris's eyes came back, in answer to her companion's next speech, Miss Levey's horse was hovering as near Vaulter as that aristocratic little quadruped (his blood was as blue in his own

conceit as that of all the Howards) would allow, and she was looking round her with that smile peculiar to a consciousness of pride (not less in her hunter than its rider) and in no way akin to the unconscious, free enjoyment of a real and perfect horsewoman.

“Vaulter looks ready for a magnificent run, Mr. Monkton,” she said, feeling anxious to hit upon a subject of conversation which should attract him to loiter with her. “Do you think we,” Rose added, patting the long sleek neck of her own animal, “stand as good a chance of being in at the death as you do?”

“Not quite, Miss Levey; your hand is too strong upon the curb. Wait until you need it.”

“Thank you,” said Rose, colouring vividly. “I am very glad of advice from you—always. Bernard takes no notice of his sisters when Miss Egerton is present, and Violet always keeps away from me with Captain Gresford. I—I find myself generally very solitary.”

“I daresay,” rejoined Scot, turning his honest glance upon her as they rode slowly from the group. “I think it quite possible to feel solitary, even in such a scene as this.”

"But I don't intend to be left behind to-day," added Rose, with a lively change of tone. "I expect to be very near you, Mr. Monkton; so pray don't flatter yourself that you will soon get rid of me."

"Be content with the snaffle, Miss Levey," said Scot, looking coolly and critically from the bit up to her restless fingers. "If you wish to spend this day without a fall, have a little respect for the power of the curb."

They had reached the phaeton by this time, and helped to swell the group of horsemen who had found something to say to Colonel Egerton or his daughter.

"Miss Egerton, do you not think that your father would like to follow to-day?"

So Bernard Levey was whispering, persuasively, when Scot came up.

"What?" asked Doris, absently, as she offered Scot her hand, and smiled up into his eyes.

But Mr. Levey, for some reason, did not repeat his question until he was the only one left of the group round the phaeton. Then he rather nervously remarked that it was unusual enough to be really painful to him, to see the hunting-field without Colonel Egerton. And, when that

observation fail unsuccessfully, he proceeded to the question direct.

"Colonel Egerton, will you accept my mount? I shall be very glad to keep to the road to-day."

The idea evidently amused Colonel Egerton: but, beyond the natural and involuntary laugh, he considered no reply necessary.

"If you will," resumed Mr. Levey, who was not gifted with the power of always seeing his own position in its true light, and to whom the comic side of a question generally lay in densest shadow, "I will drive Miss Egerton in your place; and I will take great care of her, Colonel."

"I do not doubt it," rejoined the officer, in his pleasant, gentle way, though he was quite grave again now. "But I have not changed my mind since I left home with the intention of driving; nor, I hope, has Doria, who wished me to drive her."

There was nothing tangible in this speech, to hurt Mr. Levey's self-pride, and he was not one to be wounded by an intangible essence. So he held his position still, and poured his ad compliments, and a few plaintive sighs,

into Doris's ear; but that small feature of hers remained just as cold and white throughout; while the wind whistled past, and carried Bernard's speeches with it, and the blush which had just for one minute that morning deepened the fresh pink tint in her cheeks, was powerless to return under his wildest and most despairing experiment. Enjoying to the full the zest of the sport and the beauty of the morning, Doris was pleased, and bright, and excited; but almost anyone save Bernard, would have seen, at a glance, that this utterly natural indifference to his most pointed flattery barely hid real weariness of it.

"If Mr. Levey would go quite away, papa," she whispered once, when they could speak unheard, "I should think this day perfection."

"There's no such thing as perfection, my dear," observed Colonel Egerton, placidly, and so drove on to covert, in the hope that Bernard would presently dart across country.

But the hope was fallacious. The day went on just as it had begun; for, though Mr. Levey made a pretence now and then of joining the hunt, it was *but* a pretence; and when he had crossed a field or fence, and sufficiently dis-

played his proportions, his dress, and his hunter, he would canter back with an expression of extreme content, and resume his progress beside the phaeton, and his string of unmistakable compliments, and rather flaccid general remarks.

At last the day—as a hunting day—was over. Colonel Egerton had drawn up his greys, and was joining in the general exultation, which men of sense and energy occasionally display in the acquisition of a torn appendage of that little animal who has made a good fight for it, but has succumbed to circumstances at last, in a manner not greatly to be wondered at while the odds are fifty to one.

The agile little fellow had kept them in pursuit for half a dozen hours, but had had to give up its panting life at last, and could offer no resistance now to that *post-mortem* indignity, the coming of which had probably cast a shadow before, and all day long hastened the flying footsteps.

Scot—dismounted, with rivers of mud meandering down his riding-boots, and brown deposits on his cords—had ignored his lawfully-earned privilege of presenting the brush, and had turned aside, to leave Vaulter—a tried and

experienced hunter already—in the charge of Major Porter's groom, when he was aware that Miss Levey had ridden on across a ploughed field, and had evidently aggravated her horse by doing so.

Scot understood no more than this. He had noticed that she had been restless and excitable all day, using the curb rashly, though she had sought his advice, and begged him to take her in charge; but he had not noticed her jealous mortification when the old master of the hounds, taking Scot's place, had, in his courteous old-world fashion, presented the brush to Doris Egerton as the youngest lady in the field. Scot's perceptions were quick and keen in everything, except that he rarely suspected any evil feeling could have prompted an otherwise accountable action, and he had started to help Rose, almost as soon as he caught sight of her horse dancing between the uneven ridges, tossing his head proudly against the reins, and tearing the little hillocks of loose soil; rearing, plunging, curveting, and, in various graceful but uncomfortable ways, taking his revenge for a course of unmitigated curb.

Coolly and distinctly, as Scot approached

her, he told her how to use her bridle hand; but, to his great surprise, a cry was his only answer. Whether Rose had worked herself into a real state of alarm, or whether this was the last touch of the feigned timidity in which she had indulged all day, Scot never doubted. To him she seemed to have lost the power of quieting her horse, and so he would do it for her. But he was in no way prepared for her ecstatic delight at seeing him, or her prompt and pathetic appeal to him to "take her down."

He had only just reached her side, and was in the act of signing to her not to leave the saddle, when she dropped her bridle, rose from the pommel, and, after only a word of warning, made a spring towards the ground. He caught her readily, though she was tall and of no trifling weight; but linked to the pleasant consciousness of having done so, was the rather more acute consciousness of having brought about a result beyond what he could have anticipated, even if he had paused to consider the consequences of this random descent of a substantial young lady of five feet six.

"Oh, Mr. Monkton, what is it?" cried Rose, as Scot stood and held the horse, waiting for

Miss Levey's groom, who was making his way cautiously towards them over the upturned soil.

"You are so pale. Oh, what is it?"

"Will you mount again, Miss Levey, or walk through this field?" inquired Scot, his voice almost stern in the intense strain he put upon himself to master this new pain.

"Oh, I must walk! I am afraid of mounting. Please put your arm in mine, Mr. Monkton. I am sure I have hurt you. What shall I do?"

Sometimes afterwards Scot would tell, even with a laugh, what that walk across the ploughed field cost him, while Miss Levey—fancying he was doing it easily—grew ashamed of having proffered help to one who was so strong and independent. But he never told of the sick faintness which came over him when he reached Colonel Egerton's carriage, and how it was that a few minutes afterwards he was in Doris's seat. How it was! Could he ever have told why her few earnest words—more of advice than entreaty—should have won his prompt obedience, while the varied exclamations around him, jarred so terribly on the pain he hid?

"You'll be all right presently, Mr. Monkton,"

said Colonel Egerton ; "it is only a sprain, I expect."

But he was keen to see that the pain was all but unbearable just now ; so he gathered up his reins, and nodded to the groom at the horses' heads.

Scot's fingers gripped the side of the phaeton. They were cold and brown, and there was a long rent in the scarlet sleeve, won in some reckless plunge through brake or brier ; yet Doris, standing near, warm and bright and pretty in her snowy furs, found her gaze resting there as if it were the page of a book, and she could read it. And when she raised her eyes, they were a little wistful, just as if the tale she read had been of suffering.

"I like to walk," she said, in her bright, prompt way, in answer to a question—or an apology—she met on Scot's face ; "it is a pleasant change for me."

Mr. Bernard Levey had by this time given his mare into the charge of his sister's groom, apparently aware of what would be a pleasant change for him also. But at that moment Doris—without seeming to have seen anything of this—looked suddenly up at the groom's little seat behind

the phaeton, and thought she might just as well drive. So all Bernard Levey's brilliant anticipations of a *tête-à-tête* dissolved into one moment's effort at assistance, while Doris stepped lightly up into the little seat, and the groom turned away to walk home alone.

"At any time, Mr. Monkton," observed Bernard Levey, with a spasmodic effort of friendly patronage for the dismounted Squire, while Doris felt his words sting her as they fell; "at any time"—repeating the words impressively, with a consciousness of her listening—"I shall be happy to lend you a mount. I had no idea Vaulter was sold, or I would have offered to-day. Indeed I should be quite proud to mount the finest rider in the field."

"But, Mr. Levey," laughed Doris, quickly answering this tactless speech, "I believe papa always thinks himself the finest rider in the field—indeed I know he does; though my own opinion is, after all, that he never feels so thoroughly at home on horseback as Mr. Monkton does. Major Porter, when do you think we are all going to start?"

It was no wonder she was anxious to drive away from the chatty and excited group; but

Major Porter, like the rest of Scot's friends, had many a last word to say to him, and they were glad to stop to say it, when they won such pleasant, easy answers; for few of them understood the healthy bravery which made all suffering for Scot his own suffering only.

Under the pretence of chatting with Doris, Rose Levey kept her horse for a time beside the phaeton; but presently she was obliged to turn aside, to follow her sister and Captain Gresford. She bade good-bye to Mr. Monkton with marked effusion, and then rode slowly, that she might watch the carriage on its way, her lips rather tight, and the expression in her eyes not very good to see.

Colonel Egerton's phaeton stopped before the side door at the Black Birches, where Liath stood looking out, with an evident attempt to appear as if he were not. Scot left his seat just as he might have done on any other day, but, as he stood, he laid his hand heavily on Liath's shoulder.

"Thank you, Colonel Egerton," he said, answering only thus the unfeigned sympathy of both father and daughter. "The only ill consequence to me will be a day's delay in my

projected run up to town. But a day will make no serious difficulty."

"A day!" exclaimed Miss Michal, afterwards, when she had, as she tearfully expressed it, "dived to the bottom of the mischief." "What prospect is there of your being able to travel in a day?"

"Every prospect, Aunt Michal, because I must do it."

"*Must* is nonsense," she muttered, wondering greatly at the odd circumstance of Scot's having sprained his foot without falling. "You always pretend your elephants are only flies, till—till"—She sobbed the remainder of her complaint in notes of minor discord—"the end of it will be—they'll—they'll crush you before—you can be prepared."

"Impossible, Aunt Michal," said the young man, cheerily. "You and I are adepts now in being always prepared for the worst; notwithstanding which, of course, we always take care to expect the best, don't we? As you say, it's a mere question of flies and elephants, after all."

CHAPTER XII.

IN spite of Scot's assertion that he must go to town next day, the morning found him unable even to walk downstairs. He spoke little of his disappointment, yet Miss Michal, for the first time in her life, could see that he was chafing sorely against the leading-strings of fate. Miss Levey drove over early in the day, with anxious inquiries, and Colonel Egerton spent a few pleasant hours with him later on. On the second morning, he walked, with a little limping and a good deal of pain, to the garden gate, and, finding himself able to accomplish that, had no further hesitation in fixing his journey to town for the next day.

Miss Michal struggled her best against this decision, but had to yield at last, consoling herself with the thought that it would take her this whole day to "think about" Scot's pack-

ing, and of what he should take for refreshment on the road.

“But I shall stay only one day, or at most two,” he said, smiling at this idea.

Yet when he saw that her mind, robbed of this employment, fell back with increased weight on an accumulated mass of woes of which this sprain was the crowning disaster, he was glad quietly to adopt her views as to the exigency of preparation, and the unutterable discomfort of not having one's “things” compressed in a travelling bag for as long a period as possible.

Therefore it was that Miss Michal was exploring in Scot's premises that morning, when she looked from the window to see him leaning at the garden-gate, giving an audience to Liath; and therefore it was that she gave vent to a little ejaculation of keen annoyance, when, from the next window, she caught sight of Miss Levey's low phaeton, and Miss Levey's elegant and lengthy figure sitting alone in it.

But Miss Michal was spared the interruption of a call upon herself, and continued her arduous task undisturbed. The phaeton had stopped for good and all at the gate, and there Rose

Levey paid her call, refusing Liath's proposal to hold her ponies, and gladly seeing that worthy leave the scene.

"I am so pleased to find you here, Mr. Monkton!" she said, setting aside whip and reins to give Scot her hand, and turning in her seat to face him, having no anxiety as to any anticipated wantonness in her phlegmatic ponies. "Of course I naturally should be more glad than anybody else, because I was the miserable cause of your accident. I had scarcely hoped to be so fortunate as to see you here. I so seldom"—with a gentle sigh—"have any of my wishes realised."

"I wonder you don't leave off wishing, then, Miss Levey," said Scot, in that cool but courteous way of his, which Rose always found it hardest to meet.

"Shall I tell you my present wish?" she asked, with the broad, insinuating smile which was peculiar to the family, and certainly fitted well the other family peculiarity of startlingly white teeth.

"If you please."

"That I might drive you, if you wish to go anywhere. Here am I with nothing to do, and

the wretched consciousness of having rendered you incapable of doing what I know you must wish. Do oblige me, Mr. Monkton. I would like to drive round your farm excessively. Do make me useful."

"It is not fair to monopolise a twofold gift," returned Scot, gravely. "Are you not content to be ornamental?"

"Indeed no," returned Rose, with *naïveté*. "Would *you* be content to be of no service to those you—you liked?"

"How could I like them if I had to serve them?"

"Oh! Mr. Monkton, of course you would. You are the very one to put yourself out for anyone you liked, and you ought to be generous, and let others do it for you. Let me drive you into Minton; you said your chief disappointment was the delay of some journey into the town."

"Not into Minton," laughed Scot. "I wanted to be in London to-day."

"Oh! On business?"

Miss Levey uttered the question slowly and thoughtfully, while a pleasant fancy was framing itself in her mind. Of course Mr. Monkton

was going to retake his estate. There would be preliminary matters to settle with his solicitors, and that was the motive for his journey to London now. Had not everyone said lately that things were going so thoroughly against him that he could not long hold out, and would soon give up his eccentric freak, and own himself glad to return to Kingswood? What else should make him anxious to be in town, when he had never cared to go for nearly a year? Yes, that was it, of course.

A satisfactory thought this was, and it brightened her glance considerably, and made her heart leap with a vague, delicious possibility. But, good as the thought was, she felt comfortably assured of allowing no evidence of this to peep out in her dreamy remark.

"I suppose other people are sometimes as lonely as I am. My friends are always leaving me, and even at home I am most solitary."

"How unpleasant!" remarked Scot, sturdily. "Can you not prevent it?"

"How?" inquired Rose, with simplicity.

"Cannot you go out with your brother and sister, when they go?"

"It is not that," she said, never doubting that the young man meant only exactly what he said,

and had really misunderstood her—"though presently I suppose I must be separated from them in reality. I shall soon lose Violet."

"Oh! I see," said Scot, with a look of laughing surprise in his eyes. "Gresford has succeeded, has he?"

Rose nodded sadly. It was not so hard to do that as falsely to assert that Captain Gresford had proposed to her sister.

"And Bernard, too," she added, plaintively;—"he is anxious to marry. Just picture my loneliness then, Mr. Monkton!"

"Probably you will soon follow their example."

"It will not be so easy to me," remarked Miss Levey, looking absently beyond Scot's face. "I am not satisfied with what would satisfy either of them; I want to make my life of use, and besides that, I want to make my fortune of use."

"An easy task too."

"I don't find it so," was the prompt avowal; "I only wish I could. I wish I had an opportunity of employing it, for it is really a burden to me. Can you not understand this feeling?"

"Not having an unusually large fortune at

my own disposal," said Scot, with great composure, "I cannot say I do."

"But, oh! Mr. Monkton, can you not help me?" exclaimed Rose, gazing, with questioning ecstasy, into his amused eyes. "Do help me, if you can, and use it for me—will you? You know so well how to use money!"

"You mean that I may perform a commission for you in town, Miss Levey?" asked Scot, quite easily; though even she could see that his lips were stern in their proud compression.

"I—no, I would not hinder you," she said, regaining the composure which Scot's reply had disturbed. "I would not interfere with your gaiety, now that you go to town so seldom."

"It will interfere with no gaiety, I can assure you. But perhaps you are going yourselves?"

"No, indeed, we are not," was the rejoinder, quick enough to be pettish. "Bernard is bent now on staying here. He is quite absurd about Miss Egerton; and yet it is plain to see she does not care an atom for him. She is only amusing herself with him."

"Is she? I should hardly have thought that possible."

"No, I am sure you would not," cried Rose, delighted in her mistaken idea that he agreed with her at last; "and I tell Bernard that no one but a heartless girl would do it. But he is literally infatuated, and thinks that she cannot be really engaged to Mr. Bradford."

"That thought must make your brother very happy."

"Oh, of course Bernard is happy," she said, wondering a little at the tone of her companion; "but I hope he will think better of asking Miss Egerton to break her first engagement; it would be so unfair—I cannot bear the thought of it."

"I would not make myself anxious about it, Miss Levey, if I were you," said Scot, with a great deal of quiet drollery in his face. "I daresay such a catastrophe will be, by some means, prevented."

"But then Bernard is so rich, you see," resumed Miss Levey, her nature too inherently mean to imagine this speech meant more than her own; "it would be such a temptation. For Mr. Bradford is only a lawyer after all, and of course he cannot give her such a home as Osborne House."

“But,” said Scot, dryly, the light of laughter quickly following the look of haughtiness upon his face,

“ ‘I’ve read in many a novel
That, unless they’ve souls that grovel,
Folk prefer, in fact, a hovel
To your dreary marble halls.’ ”

“Oh, Mr. Monkton,” cried Rose, “you do give me such strange ideas sometimes !”

“But it was you who gave me that idea,” he answered, gathering up her reins, but standing courteously beside her. “It was you who said that riches were a burden. I never thought so.”

“Yes, but I didn’t put it in a comical light, as you did,” fretted Rose, with a swift rush of colour to her face.

“No ; it was certainly I who put it in a comical light. I think it a capital light through which to view—riches.”

“What did he mean by that last sentence ?” mused Rose, practically, as she drove away in solitary state. “He seemed to think something was very comical—and I don’t think he could have meant riches. Why should he mean riches, when he is so short of them, and must miss

them tremendously? I wish I could have put the meaning a little more plainly; but perhaps now he will think it over, and—and,” concluded Rose, with a flash of colour in her face, though she was driving alone through Kingswood park, and the only eye upon her was one round orb of a veteran robin, who expanded his little peach breast in vain—“and will see how I love him.”

The robin blinked peacefully upon his bare twig again, for the long dark object which had disturbed his own especial solitude had passed and left him in safety.

Perhaps he knew as much about “the loveliness of loving well” as Rose did; but, if so, he had his own little thoughts all to himself up there, and no voice could whisper to Rose that best of all she loved herself.

CHAPTER XIII.

“**A**ND he is really able to go to London tomorrow morning, is he, papa?”

Colonel Egerton and his daughter were strolling in the garden as the evening shadows fell, and this was not by any means the first time Doris had questioned her father concerning that visit which, early in the day, he had paid at the Black Birches.

“Yes, dear, so he says. He’s all right, I think, now, except for a little lameness; and he seems excessively anxious about this London business, whatever it may be. But I didn’t stay long, as I saw Liath wanted him. Ah, look there!”

The girl’s eyes went first up to her father’s, and then followed them, to see a young man hurrying towards her among the dusky shadows of the park.

"Kenneth!" she cried.

And then they went to meet him; and when her eyes rested on his face, and both her hands lay in his, she saw that his life's ambition was within reach at last, and that he had come to tell her so.

How he told her, she never quite remembered. But she knew it all at the time, and her bright tenderness and pleasant enthusiasm were most sweet to him in his intense, suppressed excitement.

His drama had been accepted for the stage. That was the key-note of the girl's bright song and laughter. All the particulars could follow presently, when she was more accustomed to the fervent gratitude and joy which stirred Kenneth's voice, and made it almost strange to her.

It was only through Colonel Egerton's intervention that any particulars were learned; for, when Doris attempted to win them, she and Kenneth invariably lost themselves in a labyrinth of amazement, conjecture, and sympathy.

"You will be the most famous dramatic poet in the world, Ken."

That was perhaps the most moderate of her

prophecies, and to it she clung with all her gentle, daring heartiness.

"If your drama succeeds, Kenneth, you are to be a famous man, I suppose ; but it is just as likely to fail, eh ?" put in Colonel Egerton, perhaps thinking a matter-of-fact view of the subject might be wholesome just then. "Now shall we go in ?"

"I wanted to ask you, Doris," he said, looking anxiously to see whether his request surprised her, "if you would come with me to the Black Birches. I want to tell Mr. Monkton of my good fortune—he has always been so kind about my writing—but of course I cannot go without you, darling."

Colonel Egerton had left them to themselves now, and so Doris turned with Kenneth, though when he first uttered his request she had paused for a moment deep in thought. They sauntered down the Larch Walk, talking still on this one engrossing theme, Doris tender in her gladness, while Kenneth tried hard to repress his excitement—an excitement which had no self-consciousness, but was the result of something even beyond his passionate delight in his art.

"Doris," he whispered, as they crossed the

bridge in the gathering darkness, "how astonished anyone would be who saw my joy, and did not understand its hidden source! Oh! my darling, no one can ever know what it is to me to feel that, within a few months now, I *may* win the success which will give me my wife!"

"Ken, there's a man under the arch of the bridge. I saw him disappear, and he has never passed through. Hurry."

He laughed at her fear, but hastened when she bade him, and in a few minutes they had reached the farm. The lamp was burning when they entered the sitting-room, and Miss Michal sat sewing in its light. They had been there quite ten minutes, before Scot came in to hear Kenneth's news. Doris saw that it was still painful to him to walk or stand, but his glad, heartfelt congratulations had no taint in them of his own suffering or trouble.

"But you have still the hardest ordeal of all to pass, Bradford," he said, presently, while they sat chatting round the fire in the lamp-light, "your 'Pensive Public.'"

"And, if they 'look sad' like the pensive

public in the poem, won't it be terrible, Mr. Monkton?" laughed Doris.

"It is not to be for a moment imagined possible," said Scot, meeting her eyes warmly and kindly; "his first night will crown the ambition of his life—I trust so with all my heart," he added, quietly.

Her eyes fell in the midst of her frank, glad gaze, and the blush rose vividly even to her brow; yet she had guessed, before to-night, that he knew of Kenneth's twofold hope, and of her promise to him.

"No play," put in Miss Michal, cheerfully, "ever succeeds at its first performance, if it is worth hearing. Scot, just ring the bell, will you? That's the third time I have heard that long knocking on the front door."

But, when the knocking was repeated a fourth time, Miss Michal clasped her hands in her lap, and appealed to Scot with a despairing "What can it be?"

"I will see," he said, rising. "I am glad of any opportunity of exercising my foot before to-morrow."

But Miss Michal was before him.

"Elizabeth," she said, sternly, as she met

her maid standing timidly in the hall, "how could you leave that door unanswered?"

"Liath told me to, ma'am."

"Why?"

"I don't know, ma'am, really."

"Liath was laughing at you, child," rebuked Miss Michal, severely. "Open the door at once."

Miss Michal stood in the inner doorway to witness her orders obeyed; but, when she saw a man step into the hall, turn and lock the door, and hang up his hat, she started back into the sitting-room with a cry.

"Hush!" said Scot, laying his hand lightly on her shoulder, "I see how it is. We ought to have expected this, Aunt Michal, and been prepared. Yet I had fancied we were prepared for the worst."

Doris had risen, in a pained confusion of ideas, only really conscious of the fact that she and Kenneth ought not to be there. The man had followed Miss Michal into the sitting-room, and now stood smiling in the lamplight, his large face hot and soiled, and his hands in his trousers pockets.

"You kept me a good while waiting at that

door," he said, "but I wasn't surprised. Your dwarfish little herd has had his eye on me and the doors all the evening. But I got him safely out of the way, through a false alarm."

Nothing in Scot's face, beyond a slight paleness, told of the tide of keen and bitter humiliation which swept over him. He was half sitting on the arm of his chair, thoroughly brave in the resolute suppression of all pain—even with a quiet dignity of his own, in this moment which held such keen degradation for a proud, refined spirit.

"You can go from this room," he said, with one slow glance at the man. "There is plenty of space for you in the house, without your intruding here."

"I don't want to intrude," was the answer, uttered with a grin. "I'm ready for my supper, too, and I see no sign of any here."

Suddenly, at the words or glance, Scot's passion rose like a storm-tossed wave; but his glance, fierce and hot now, was intercepted by a young, earnest face, and the fingers of his right hand, in their tightening strain, were held between two small, soft palms. It was all over in one minute, and then Doris—to excuse the

involuntary action, for which Kenneth, looking on, had thanked her in his heart—said simply,

“Good-bye, Mr. Monkton.”

She longed to add an entreaty that he and Miss Windish would go back with them, but her rare and delicate tact kept back the words.

The man in possession had thought it wise to leave the room by that time; and Miss Michal was sighing with relief. Scot had risen, and, though Doris had dropped her left hand, her right was still in his.

“Good-bye. Shall you really go to London to-morrow, Mr. Monkton?”

“If possible; my reason for going is more potent now than it was before.”

“Then papa says, as he has to meet that train, will you please go with him? He will bring the phaeton round in good time. Papa does so dislike a solitary drive into Minton, and there is generally such a delay if he takes the train from here.”

Scot thanked her quietly, as much for what she left unsaid as for what she said, and then both he and Miss Michal took them to the garden gate.

"You would scarcely think," said Kenneth, as they two walked out of hearing, in the darkness, "that Mr. Monkton could be so cool and pleasant five minutes after that burst of passion which he could scarcely stay, and would not have stayed, I think, but for something in your face when you said good-bye."

"Miss Michal," said Doris, hurrying to the words, with a catch in her breath, "did not shed a single tear."

After that, it happened that an unusual silence fell upon these two, who, when they crossed this bridge an hour before, had been so merry and exultant.

The Winter evening was calm and pleasant, the wind so gentle that it only stirred the tree-tops far above them, and one by one the lustrous starry eyes opened beyond. They had reached the end of the Larch Walk before either of them broke the silence; and then Doris linked her hands on Kenneth's arm, and raised her face to his, in the dim, tender starlight.

"Kenneth, you came to me in such gladness and delight, and now you are so sad. Oh, I wish you had not come to-night."

"Why, my darling?"

"Because this shadow has fallen so drearily across your—our festivity."

"My dear," said Kenneth, with that simple manly thoughtfulness which is so rare in the young and enthusiastic, "mine was not a real festival, only the festival of *hope*; and I'm sure you are not one to cherish the narrow thought that life is all sunshine for one and shadow for another. The hope I brought with me—and over which you helped me to rejoice, dear—is only to bring me a trial, and that *may* end in darkness."

"Kenneth—how?"

Doris hardly knew the words were uttered, so involuntarily had they passed her twitching lips.

"If my first trial before the public fails, Doris," he answered, steadily, but very quietly, "I shall never ask you for the fulfilment of that promise you gave me on the last day we spent together at Richmond."

"Oh, you will, Kenneth!"

"Never. It is a vow I registered, side by side with that other vow to work unwearyingly for that happy end."

"And you will never break the vow?"

"Never ; for I love you far too dearly to link your fate with mine—if mine is to be a hard one."

"Then, Kenneth," the girl answered, very softly, "if your play is not successful on its first night, *I* shall remind you of your promise, instead of waiting until you remind me, and—and I shall ask you for your love. Shall you refuse me?"

"Oh, Doris," he cried, and stood and held her there beside him in the starshine, "my own beloved, how could I answer you as I ought? Could I deal my own death-blow?"

"But you will succeed."

"Yes, I shall succeed—I will succeed," he said, his words shaken in this delicious proof of the steadfastness of the love he prized ; "but what is it, Doris darling? Your voice has tears in it."

"Tears!" she echoed, with a faint, unmirthful smile upon her lips, though her eyes were filled with a wistful tenderness. "No tears, Kenneth. We have made each other a solemn promise, out here alone in the silence and the starlight. When you come to me for my promise, I shall be ready ; and, if you do not, I—I shall come to

you. It is a lifelong and religious promise. You understand, Kenneth?"

But his answer—so slow and broken in its gratitude—was for her ear alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

“EUSTON.”
“What class?”

For a moment Scot paused, in a calculating uncertainty which was utterly new to him. It was because the question was strange to him that so many thoughts crowded themselves into that brief pause before the clerk had lowered his head to see for whose answer he waited. Then, knowing Mr. Monkton, he apologised, and drew a first-class ticket from its recess.

“Third.”

Mr. Monkton's cool reply stopped him just as the noisy stamp came down. Scot's mind had made itself up quickly and easily in that moment. On his way to borrow money, what right had he to spend more than was absolutely necessary? So it framed itself, and, thinking nothing of the man's surprise or possible con-

tempt, Scot gave his green ticket to be clipped, and walked on down the platform; a little amused by the sight of the porters saluting a third-class passenger so respectfully; showing his amusement a little as, in his pleasant easy courtesy, he returned their greeting.

Quizzically he looked round the compartment when he had taken his seat; but a pleasant laughter shone in his eyes when he saw that the only other occupant was a little boy of about six, his small chin propped upon a knotted comforter, and his wide, timid eyes struggling very hard to be resolute. A little fellow with an air of importance in his attitude which contradicted the shrinking of the tiny figure, and the wide, scrutinising glance up into Scot's eyes; a curious little figure indeed, bundled up in two shabby coats, with a thin cord round his neck, on which was strung his half ticket, and an address written large and clearly on an envelope; while he grasped a little worn leathern bag, which yet looked large and heavy in such a feeble hold. But presently there broke a slow smile into the anxious babyish eyes, for they had met Scot's, which were so warm and kind. Mr. Monkton, sitting opposite

the child, bent towards him to read the label aloud.

"You are going almost as far as I am," he said, just in the soft, genial tones that children love. "What a little fellow for such a long journey! Does your father live there?"

"Oh, no!" The words were almost a sob, and yet uttered with such an effort at bravery—an effort pitifully comic.

"I'm glad I got into this carriage," observed Scot, with gravity; "I shall like to have your little company. Do you often travel?"

"I shan't travel again, thank you, I think," returned the child, with old-fashioned politeness, as he looked dreamily out through the window. "I'm going to mother."

"Oh!" Scot drew a long and rather puzzled breath. "And is your mother there?" pointing to the label on the child's muffled chest.

"Yes; mother sings, and she's always away—always. Mother doesn't like staying at home. She says it's dull at home, 'cause"—screwing up the small, cold lips expressively—"we're poor, father'n me."

"Yet you are going to your mother now," questioned Scot, "and leaving father?"

"Father says he has a reason," the boy answered, slowly, as if he himself grew puzzled over this, though he could never doubt the reason's being potent. "He says it's better. He's taught me to do things, and he says I shall be useful, so he wrote to tell mother I should go."

"And how will your father get on without you?"

"He won't get on well without me," the child answered, shaking his head with an unutterable sadness which seemed born of experience, "and I begged not to go. But he said it was better, and he wouldn't let me cry, and that the fields would be so pretty in the train."

"And which," inquired Scot, though fully alive to the impropriety of his question, "do you like best—father or mother?"

The red mounted as slowly into the little white face as if it had known the experience of manhood, and Scot knew that the answer did not come straight from that loving, beating heart.

"I love them both as well as each other; oughtn't I to?"

The chat went on after that pretty fluently,

Scot conducting his part in a spirit of rather respectful though pleasant inquiry, and the child his with grave and wondering politeness.

At the first important station in which they stopped, Scot went into the refreshment-room to look for something which the boy might like; and on his return to the platform great was his surprise to see the little fellow standing alone, grasping his bag, and looking from his comforter trustfully upon the passing figures, waiting, in utter confidence among these strangers, to be guided and helped.

"My child," said Scot, taking the bag and one cold hand, "you haven't done with the train yet."

"Haven't I? Oh, I thought this might be where I had to stop," the boy answered, with caution. "Father said I must be careful, 'cause I couldn't go beyond my ticket."

"Now," he added, as he took his seat again, propping his bag carefully beside him, and opening it because he saw the parcel in his companion's hands, "there's dinner at the top; is it time to eat it?"

Looking down upon the small, thin face, Scot answered that no time could be half so good.

"I know father laid it all at the top," the child said, deftly unfastening the string which served instead of a lock ; " he put lots of paper, les' it should spoil my best clo'es."

"Are your best clothes in there?"

"Yes, all," the child answered, with laudable though quiet pride ; " and they're quite new—that's why I came to-day. I was goin' on We'nesday, but when Mr. Evans brought my clo'es he wouldn't leave them, 'cause father hadn't change. He took them back, and father's been all the week getting change; he says it's scarce lately. And I've got two clean shirts," the child added, diving into his bag in a deft and cautious manner which opened Scot's eyes a little to his home life ; " father put the buttons on last night, and I threaded his needle, and I've got three new pocket-han'kerchiefs that were father's Christmas-box. I gave him one; he said he liked it better than sweets. I think useful things are best; don't you?"

"Far best," returned Scot, promptly answering the unchildlike piece of wisdom.

"It's a nice dinner," remarked the little one gravely, as he spread his small assortment of provisions on the seat.

"Milk!" exclaimed Scot, in a perfect rapture, as he bent over the feast, keeping his eyes low.

"Yes, milk," echoed the child, still with subdued and wistful gravity; "father and me walked four miles to get it yesterday, and weren't a bit tired. Father said he wished we'd go every day."

When his little feast was spread, the child folded his hands, and reverently asked God's blessing upon it. Scot folded his hands too, and echoed the childish "Amen."

"You drink first, please," the little fellow said, politely handing Scot a small mug addressed in gold letters "To Willy;" and Scot, imbibing long, if not deeply, returned the cup with the natural supposition that the child's name was Willy.

"Yes — Willy Knight; and father's Mr. Knight, but mother's Mamselle Koni, when she's singing. I s'pose you've heard mother sing?"

Scot confessed with reluctance that he had not done so yet, and the child shook his head in sympathy.

"Now there's a bun each, please," said Willy, handing the paper to Scot, who was feasting

with every appearance of enjoyment. "Father's just having his dinner now, I dare say. I hope he's got it nice."

"Who generally gets it?"

"I do, when it's br'en cheese. On week days one of us has to be in the shop, though father says it doesn't much matter, 'cause no body comes in. While I'm away, he's going to get rich, and then he'll come to fetch me."

"And you will write long letters to him while you are away?" asked Scot, gently.

"I should like to," the little fellow answered, with a great tenderness in his quiet voice; "but he told me not."

"And has father no relations?" inquired Scot, as now he took his turn, and fed his little entertainer with cakes of marvellous manufacture.

"Mother has," Willy answered, with an unconscious sadness, "and they live quite close to us nearly; but I never go there, nor father doesn't, and they never smile at us. There are two boys as little as me, but they go to school—oh! I should like to go to school!—and"—here the small lips tightened with a thoughtful, puzzled expression out of place in

CHAPTER XV.

THERE is very little in the appearance of Duke Street particularly to awe, or even unduly to impress, the chance and unfamiliar visitor ; but the town *habitué* knows its value, and when a professional gentleman is fortunate enough to possess handsomely-furnished rooms on the first floor of one of its most imposing houses, he may be excused for being very greatly impressed indeed. Who should know so well their value as he who is constantly reminded of it by the figures in his rent receipts ? And who can more fully appreciate their position than he who has experienced the advantage of being established within that exclusive quadrangle formed by Piccadilly and Pall Mall on the north and south, and Regent and St. James's Streets on the east and west ?

True it is not a mighty area, but great re-

sults rarely emerge from unlimited space; and could all the earth's surface show a spot better suited for radial purposes? Could any address, emblazoned on fine vellum paper, more surely carry to the dimmest corner of the kingdom a satisfactory testimonial as to the open dealing and select position of the gentleman whose name so candidly accompanied this vermilion address?"

The name was a simple name, and the gentleman who appropriated it—and to whom it had become familiar after a brisk course of uninterrupted signature—was a gentleman of simple appearance. So almost rustic, indeed, were his tastes and manners that it would have required a very unusually keen perception to detect any less familiarity with the rural districts to which many of his rather unvaried letters were sent, than with the limited area from which they radiated.

There was evidence of wide and unprejudiced ideas even in the furnishing of his handsome room. The fox-hunting squire, battling, with strong limbs and feeble heart, against a "temporary embarrassment," could find distraction and amusement in the valuable and spirited

paintings of the field. The jaded householder, as he waited patiently to learn his error in having fancied that simple words had simple meanings, might easily grow bright with hope and confidence when his eyes ranged over the titles of the well-bound books about him, and he knew by experience the good and noble thoughts which lay within them. The young ensign, coming in with hand outstretched for the "temporary loan" which had been proffered him, and which he felt he had nothing to do but accept, must pause to listen to the soft, sweet tones of a musical box which tinkled from the distance, though, while he listened, the gulf might open unawares before him. The widowed mother, faltering in her gratitude as she acceded to the kind and welcome request to state, without fear, her "trifling financial entanglements," could not help her eyes resting upon the exquisite statuette of the Babes in the Wood, and her thoughts wandering pleasantly to those little ones at home who had just such innocent faces, and from whose future, by this kindly aid to-day, she would lift the hovering cloud. And the grey-haired schoolmistress, who had just told, shrinkingly, how a sudden demand for an old

debt had frightened her—but had not told whose dissolute hand had spent her earnings—could scarcely help reading that letter which lay open on the table near her, and, in a large, clear handwriting, offered heartfelt thanks for most timely help.

But, of all objects which the room contained, not one could boast the combination of attractions possessed by one of its living occupants this afternoon—the gentleman to whom belonged the name repeated on the countless letters which, from this aristocratic centre, carried hope; and joy, and ruin to so many hundreds of homes. Upon his bald head the fire-light shed a warm and genial glow, while his face beamed with an enticing candour. His dress was plain and easy, and there was no jewelry of any kind visible upon his upright, stalwart person. He was leaning now, anxiously and kindly, towards his companion, his smooth face shining with interest and sympathy, and his long white hands outstretched upon the table, as if they offered already the prompt and generous loan.

But yet, if anyone could have laid bare the secrets of that prison-house (before whose door

the smiling face was such an impenetrable guard), it would have been plain that Mr. Albert Mostyn did not experience his usually complacent assurance that he stood revealed to his visitor as a man of disinterested probity, to whom the world was merely a field for his general and unlimited beneficence—a battle-field on which he stood to raise the wounded, or a garden in which he wandered, watering and propping the drooping plants.

No; he had put both these pet similes before this visitor, and yet failed to bring into his brave, anxious face any look beyond one of surprise, which was more akin to contempt than confidence.

It was a rather puzzling and unfamiliar face to Mr. Mostyn, telling of a proud, high-bred sense of rectitude, a quiet, steady fearlessness, and a true and dignified refinement; so unfamiliar a face, indeed, that it would have excited suspicion in the good man's breast, but for its wearing the look of thorough perplexity which was so remarkably familiar to him.

“Your letter reached me fortunately at a time when I was very anxious to procure a temporary loan of sixty pounds.”

"Sixty pounds," repeated Mr. Albert Mostyn, in a tone of soothing reflection; "only sixty pounds?"

"Only sixty pounds," answered Mr. Monkton, quite aware that his companion looked with generous contempt upon this sum. "But I require it immediately."

Mr. Mostyn, by a nod, expressed his readiness to smooth every thorn from the path of a weak brother.

"You say in your letter," resumed Scot, looking down upon the paper he held, not with the usual brief glance of reference, but with an intent gaze of real study, "that, upon my note of hand, in a few hours, without inquiry fees or securities, without trouble, delay, or expense to me, you will advance me the money I need, at a moderate rate of interest. You have no object in investing your capital, you say, beyond the benefit of those of your fellow-creatures who——"

"Perfectly correct," put in Mr. Mostyn, suavely interrupting Scot's solemn epitome of the lithographed epistle; "you are perfectly correct, sir, in your recapitulation of the temptations my offer contains."

"And, beyondt his," added Scot, still in that curious manner which was almost sad in its intense seriousness, "you promise my application shall be treated with the strictest confidence."

Mr. Mostyn nodded again, with a slight motion of the open palms, suggestive of that meek humanity which keeps the charitable deeds of the right hand in profound secrecy from the (possibly usurious) left.

"That being your generous offer," concluded Scot, as he quietly folded his letter, "I have come to borrow sixty pounds on those terms."

"To that sum, or twice as much," observed Mr. Mostyn, with geniality, as he arranged the papers on his writing-table (his very touch guided by tenderness, and an unwillingness to hurt or discompose even inanimate objects), "you are invited to lay claim. I will give you a form which I should like you to fill in, just by way of laying matters simply before us both. It is always well to see things clearly in a matter of business, even though, as in this case, the word 'business' is a mere sinecure. Those who come frankly and confidently to me in their embarrassments, as you come to-day, Mr.

Monkton, come to a real friend. Business seems almost a ridiculous epithet to apply to such a case, and yet"—a certain long and partially printed sheet of paper had been selected from the rest, and Mr. Mostyn's hands lay lovingly upon it—"and yet we may as well go through this trifling formula. If you will fill in the vacant spaces here, I will take the opportunity of speaking to my clerk, for I have promised a poor lady one hundred pounds by five o'clock, and I would not disappoint her for any temptation. My clerk—quite naturally, as he is young, and his sympathies are not so acute as my own—does not feel the weight of my responsibilities, and so requires an occasional reminder. Allow me to pass you this pen. I was just making it when you came in, and it writes almost of its own accord. Thanks. I know you will excuse me for these few minutes, in the interest of a distressed fellow-creature."

"Why should I fill in this form?" asked Scot, in his clear, straightforward tones, as he read. "Why should I tell you my age—position—prospects—income—friends—whether I am already in debt—probable means of repaying this sixty pounds—and"—lifting his eyes again,

keen and true—"other absurd particulars?"

"Absurd indeed," assented Mr. Mostyn, raising his eyebrows so high that for the first time the placid and benevolent surface of his brow was wrinkled; "but still it is a form to which I have grown accustomed, and my nature is obstinately conservative. I shall simply read over the contents, just to make myself feel more familiar with you, and then I shall destroy the paper. You see," with a pensive smile, "elderly men generally possess one crotchet, and mine is a delicacy in verbally discussing the private affairs of gentlemen who come to me in trust and confidence. I can here see at a glance all I need to see, and then"—with again the gracious motion of his open palms—"the paper may consume to ashes, with my heartiest goodwill. Now kindly excuse me for one minute."

There was time for the task to be completed half a dozen times, before Mr. Mostyn re-entered the room, to find his visitor standing at the window. He took up the completed form, which lay on the table undisfigured by any vacant spaces, and slipped it absently into a drawer, telling the while how his clerk had detained him to look into a matter—a very sad

little matter he had undertaken—the extrication of a thoughtless young nobleman from the hands of a firm of city usurers.

“And now,” said Scot, rousing himself from his thoughtful gaze and attitude, “I shall be much obliged for the notes at once.”

“They will be ready for you, my dear sir,” returned Mr. Mostyn, smiling at the notion of there being a doubt upon that head, “in the course of a few hours; but”—As the tone of lingering regret crept into his voice, he drew from his pocket a handsome gold hunter, undecorated by any ornaments, and suspended only by the plain black ribbon which crossed his broad and philanthropic breast—“as I like to consider my business hours over at four, I must trouble you to give me a call to-morrow.”

“I had not intended to stay in town to-night,” began Scot.

“What a pity!—what a pity!” murmured Mr. Mostyn, in a meditative tone. “And yet why not stay, Mr. Monkton? Why not”—with a brighter kindliness of tone—“take a few hours’ enjoyment to-night? You must know so well where to seek it—here where every pleasant haunt has been familiar to you.”

“Am I obliged to stay?” asked Scot, proudly and quietly. “Could you not finish this affair for me? You wrote that it could be done immediately.”

“Needing the loan immediately, my dear sir,” said Mr. Mostyn, with deprecating gentleness, “you should have endeavoured to be here earlier in the day. I would have set everything aside to accommodate you.”

Scot answered by a slight, leisurely bow, and, having no further wish to delay his departure, left the handsome room, conscious that the only feeling which its varied adornments had excited in him was one of surprise, which had a keen uneasiness about it.

Mr. Albert Mostyn's clerk had scarcely had time to air his newspapers the next morning, when Mr. Monkton entered the office and asked for Mr. Mostyn. The clerk, poised on one leg before the fire, dropped the ringed hand which held the supplement of the *Telegraph*, and regretfully informed Mr. Monkton that Mr. Mostyn had been summoned to Windsor to consult with a lady who was in great difficulty; that he had left the office five minutes after his arrival there, and that his return, though of course so highly desirable, was at present uncertain.

When, for the fourth time that day, Scot mounted the stairs in Duke Street, it was to hear only the same reply—Mr. Mostyn had not yet returned.

“But,” added Mr. Mostyn’s clerk, rising from his chair with a certain involuntary feeling of respect, the memory of which amused him greatly afterwards, “I have just received a telegram from him, in which he begs me to appoint an interview with you, as early as you can be here to-morrow morning. Several gentlemen are in there, waiting to make appointments,” he added, waving his hand to the closed door of communication between the offices, with a kindly pity for them, “but I am to give you the preference.”

Scot fixed the earliest hour at which the offices would be open, and once more left the street which was growing so uncomfortably familiar to him.

Another evening and night passed, and, just as the Westminster clock chimed the quarter-past ten next morning, Scot was once more ushered into the bland, benign presence of Mr. Albert Mostyn.

“Take a seat, pray, Mr. Monkton. I hope

my unavoidable absence from town yesterday did not——”

“Pardon my hastening you,” interposed Scot, speaking courteously in his companion’s smiling, interrogatory pause. “I daresay we both think our time valuable, and we can spare each other.”

“Then I have merely to trouble you to take up those notes, and sign that receipt,” observed Mr. Mostyn, rather surprised to find that his visitor had no desire for extraneous conversation.

Scot glanced at the notes, and then read the paper given him to sign. When he raised his head again, and met the eyes of the gentleman whose only aim in life was to employ his capital in the interests of humanity, that philanthropist experienced a novel and rather uncomfortable sensation. There were few expressions of the human countenance to which his professional experience had not familiarised him, but anything like this clear, straightforward glance—in which the surprise and disappointment were nothing compared with the keen intelligence, and honest, frank contempt—had never before fallen across his sunny way.

“I am to sign a receipt for sixty pounds,” said Scot, his quick, high-bred tones stirred with passion, which almost sounded like amusement, “in return for two notes, each for twenty pounds. To what kind of arithmetic am I to apply that test?”

“If you read over the receipt you will understand,” replied Mr. Mostyn, advancing softly towards his companion, with the intention of assisting his lethargic intelligence.

“As you see, I have already been put to considerable expense in this matter, and, though I have no desire to make my benefits profitable, you cannot, of course,”—with a glance of inquiry absolutely winning in its simplicity—“expect me to supply forms and stamps, and all requisites for making the transaction prompt and private—*prompt*,” he repeated, dropping his fingers lightly and carelessly upon the notes, “and *private*—and charge nothing, I myself being charged so heavily for everything. Indeed you would scarcely credit what I pay for advertising and postage alone, not to speak of these apartments, and my clerks’ salaries; besides a hundred other things necessary in this course which I so anxiously pursue. And, be-

sides that," he added, not perhaps quite so easily as if Mr. Monkton had not been still waiting for him to finish his explanation, "there is, of course, the interest."

"So, by means of an exorbitant interest, charged in advance——"

"That is a universal and perfectly legal custom in the profession," interposed Mr. Mostyn, suavely. "You must have had very little experience indeed to have been unprepared for that."

"I *have* had very little experience before to-day," returned Scot; "and I was unprepared to find that, by charging such interest, with various other ingenious methods, you would bring the sum of sixty pounds, which I required—and for which you oblige me to pay interest—down to forty pounds, which is useless to me."

"It is our method," Mr. Mostyn remarked, with a gentle sigh; "it is the unvarying custom of all gentlemen who employ their capital as I do."

"Do you ever deal with—men?" inquired Scot, in that resolute quietness of his which suppressed all passion.

"Unfortunately," answered Mr. Mostyn, with

rather an abortive attempt at pleasantry, "those who entreat my help are often women. Poor things," he added, in a tone of dreamy commiseration, "poor things! You would hardly credit, I am sure, Mr. Monkton, from what distress I have sometimes had the pleasure of rescuing them—poor things!"

"I can credit it," Scot said. "Nothing but the very darkest despair could bring anyone to this pass." And as he spoke, he took into his nervous, steady hand the paper he had been asked to sign, and looked down upon it once again, his face stern and lined. "Who—unless driven mad with despair—would borrow on these terms?"

"I regret to say," observed Mr. Mostyn, with placidity, "that those who come to me *are* very often driven mad with despair, and are very grateful to win relief on such easy terms. If you will think over the risks I run, you will acknowledge that my demands are barely such as anyone might expect to pay for the convenience."

"Yes, I will think them over," returned Scot, still very calm, "when I feel myself the idiot you take me for. In the meantime you had better perhaps think them over yourself."

"Thought," observed Mr. Mostyn, running his long white fingers between the buttons of his waistcoat, "has become second nature with me. It is rarely indeed that I am free from deep and anxious reflection."

"For others, of course?"

"For others, of course," rejoined the elder man, apparently so lost in meditation that it was curious, a moment afterwards, to see the sharp suspicious glance he gave into his companion's face, when Scot threw from him the paper he had been holding.

"Why do you not sign it, Mr. Monkton?"

"Because, fool as I am, I am not fool enough for that."

"But it has been prepared for you," began Mr. Mostyn, the suavity forsaking him, "and my time has been employed for you."

"Put a value on your time, then," said Scot, with proud and passionate haste—"you know well how to value your time and your money—and then demand its price. I shall be proud to be sued by you for the sum. The publicity which I will then give to your philanthropy, if it save only one poor dupe, will repay me even for the degradation of having sat under your

roof, and let *you* speak to me of truth and honour."

"Having gone so far in this matter," put in Mr. Mostyn, making a great effort to speak genially still, "you must take the loan. If forty pounds in hand is insufficient for you, we will raise the loan, and advance you the sixty."

"If you advanced me six hundred," returned Scot, his handsome head erect, and his eyes running scornfully over the portly figure opposite him, "it would not make a shade of difference. I have been fool enough to come here for assistance, and so I can fancy how other men, in their extremity, could come to you; but I do not step, with my eyes open, into a hotbed of knavery and hypocrisy—you like the words, do you? I see they move you more than the sorrows of those who come in their despair to lay themselves under your heavy, grinding heel. I wonder at it, too; for with both knavery and hypocrisy you must be pleasantly familiar, now that you are travelling hand-in-hand."

"I shall be under the unpleasant necessity," spoke Mr. Mostyn, huskily, "of making you compensate me for every word of this insult."

No man has ever trifled with me and gone unpunished."

"No man has ever crossed your threshold and gone unpunished, I should fancy. It would take years to rise upright again from such a humiliation."

"Do you think," blurted Mr. Mostyn, his bland face becoming red and swollen, "that such words are not actionable, just because I am——"

It was really for want of breath he paused, but Scot filled in the pause with a cool air of assistance.

"A philanthropic gentleman, whose only wish in life is to smooth the way for a weak brother or sister—Heaven pity them!"

"When I was asked to send my letter to you," said Mr. Mostyn, as he gently wiped the small drops of moisture from his brow, while his words opened Scot's eyes suddenly to the trap which had been laid for him, "I was told that you were a gentleman—a gentleman of high birth, only in temporary embarrassment."

"The *gentleman* who informed you," returned Scot, with quick, unutterable contempt, "understands the title thoroughly; I lay no claim to it; I leave it to him and to you. I am a

man, though, and, as a man, I will speak of you before other men, if you give me the opportunity you promise, in a court of justice."

"You would have to pay dearly for such words," muttered Mr. Mostyn, with but a feeble remnant of his smooth benevolence.

But Scot Monkton was beyond hearing now, and the threat fell lamely back upon himself.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN even keener disappointment, though not so humiliating a one, met Scot when he reached Mr. Bradford's offices in Gray's Inn Square. From the moment of his leaving Duke Street, he had had no uncertainty in his mind as to what he should do, now that that anticipated means of escape was closed against him, for there was no second course possible. So, while his thoughts were still angrily and scornfully hovering about those handsome premises in Duke Street, he was walking, in utter singleness of purpose, towards Gray's Inn Square.

And here it was that the last and keenest disappointment awaited him. Mr. Bradford had been in Edinburgh for some days, and it was not at all certain when he would return. Scot, his eyes a little tired in all their strength and steadfastness, looked in vain for Kenneth.

Young Mr. Bradford had not yet returned from Kingswood, Reynolds said, feeling how vexed his employer would be about this untoward visit of Mr. Monkton's, not only the first he had paid at his solicitor's office since he had left Grosvenor Place, but evidently one with an important motive.

Reynolds, simply as an excuse for leaving Mr. Monkton's presence while he was so puzzled, went out to consult the junior clerks as to the probability of Mr. Kenneth's return that day.

"It does not signify," Scot said, quietly thanking them as he walked back through the outer office, an unusual slowness in his tread; "it is only Mr. Bradford whom I wished to see, and I will write."

Reynolds, anxious and troubled as he hurried to the door, suggested that Mr. Monkton might perhaps choose to write there, and his letter should be given to Mr. Bradford in the first minute of his return.

So Scot turned back and wrote, in few lines, how he needed now the help his old friend had so often and so warmly proffered; and, leaving the letter sealed upon his table, went out again

to walk in the crowd of the great city, which had ever until these last few days worn for him so different an aspect. But Scot Monkton was not one to walk among his fellow-men wrapped selfishly in his own thoughts, and before he had reached Euston Station, he had read many a sad story upon the faces that he met, and had once or twice given a word or hand of help to those who sorely needed it.

At last the North-Western train was on its way, and Scot was travelling back to Minton, with the depressing consciousness that his journey had been utterly useless; giving him only trouble and expense. He was trying, with his old undaunted spirit, to argue with himself that even *that* was better than that he should have fallen an easy prey to the philanthropy of Mr. Albert Mostyn, when the train stopped at Kilburn, and he looked from the carriage window, with a vivid and sad remembrance of the little boy from whom he had parted here two days ago.

And there, upon the platform, a sight met his eyes which thrilled him with unaccountable sadness. Standing back from the passing groups, utterly solitary in their midst, his small

bag in his hand, the comforter still round his neck, and the label—soiled and crumpled now—suspended below it, his wide, wistful eyes fixed steadily upon the train, stood the little figure which had been at that instant occupying Scot Monkton's thoughts. No ticket kept the written label company now; and yet the child seemed waiting there for another journey. Scot was out upon the platform before these thoughts had even grown definite; and he bent and touched the boy gently—for he had not turned from his intent watch.

But when, at this touch, the child looked up, Scot felt that he should remember all his life the sudden brightening of those tired, hungry eyes, and the cry which passed the small, cold lips.

“Oh! I'm so glad!—so glad! I didn't know you were here. I'm going back—I'm going home—to father.”

And then Scot's hand was seized by the tiny fingers, which were so eager in their clinging grasp, and yet so gentle too.

He could not help it. He took the little fellow up in his arms, bag and all, and laid the cold, wet cheek against his own. There was

no time for questioning or hesitation. Unthinkingly dropping into his old habits, Scot gave a porter the only sovereign he possessed, and sent him for the half-ticket. The man, with a kindly glance into the wistful white face, and quick to recognise a true gentleman in this third-class passenger, hurried to do his bidding, and not only came back in time to hand the ticket in, but brought an orange too, which he dropped without a word, as if by chance, beside the child's bag.

"And so," said Scot, his one arm still round the little trembling form, "you were going back to father without a ticket?"

"A ticket!" the child echoed, in a tired, troubled tone. "I couldn't get a ticket; it was more than a penny, and I hadn't more. I told them father'd pay when I got home—I told them my name and all,—but they didn't look at me again."

"Perhaps they did not hear," suggested Scot, very gently, in the child's wistful pause of inquiry. "But you are all right now. Let us take the label off, lest it should lead you wrong."

But the child looked up with anxious entreaty, holding the string firmly in both hands.

"No—please no," he whispered. "Father told me to keep it on till I found mother, and I haven't found her."

"How is that?" asked Scot, very low and very kindly, as he dropped the string and looked down into the wide, frightened eyes.

"Because she's gone—away. The lady told me she was gone with somebody that wasn't father, and she hadn't said a word 'bout me; and I thought of father, and——"

But here, to Scot's alarm, one quick, impetuous sob broke from the sad little heart, and, as if it had removed the flood-gate, others followed, hurriedly, recklessly, until the little shaking frame seemed utterly exhausted, and the eyes which had been so long undaunted, were hidden on the young man's breast.

"Willy," he whispered, presently, longing for the little voice to break the silence which followed this passionate burst of weeping, "see how fast we are going. You will soon be home again with father. Think how happy he will be presently, when the door opens just a little way, and a small face peeps in, and he sees that his little boy is come back! Won't he be happy then?"

"But," said Willy, lifting his wet eyes a little, "he'll cry 'bout mother. He cried all night after she went. He said he didn't, so he didn't know; but I stroked his face in the dark, and felt the tears."

"He will not cry to-day," asserted Scot, with confidence. "Now tell me all that has happened since you and I said good-bye. Did you find the place?"

"I found it," the child said, speaking softly and sorrowfully, as he laid his fingers on the label. "A kind man showed me all the way to there, and then the lady told me mother was gone, and she said she didn't know me, and I came away; and she caught me, and asked me where I was going, and I said to father; and she wouldn't let me, and put me to bed, and said she'd write to father, and I must wait for him. But I wouldn't let her take off this, 'cause father said only when I found mother; and I said, 'Please, I must go to father,' and she locked the door. And I stayed and stayed; but this morning, when it was light, it was open, and I ran away. I looked all about for the train, and then they wouldn't let me get in; and I waited, and I thought soon they'd

let me, if I didn't tease. And I was waiting, and then"—with a gentle smile of happiness, which was pitifully subdued—"you came. That was all."

Yes, that was all, unless a watchful Hand, unseen, had guided the little one.

No wonder that, soon after this, the weary child fell asleep within Scot's kind, protecting arm; and, while he held him very still, he looked down into the little sleeping face, and wondered how such tidings could be borne as those that he was taking home.

"Minton!"

Scot raised his head, and looked out into the familiar station which was to have been his destination; but he never left his seat through the few minutes' pause, or slackened his hold of the sleeping child.

Then once more the train moved on through the gathering dusk of the Winter evening; and an hour afterwards it stopped at the town from which the child had told Scot he had started on his first journey, two days ago, and where his father's home was.

"Willy," Scot whispered, rousing him gently,

“our journey is over. . Now let us go and find your father.”

The streets were lighted glaringly as they walked through them; the young man glancing among the strange faces, simply by force of habit, for his generous thoughts—far away from his own perplexities—were centred in the sorrow which had been so strangely brought before him; and the child hurrying over the ground he knew so well, talking now of *father* and *home*, yet all the time still clinging, timidly and trustingly, to his companion.

The lights in the shop windows lent the chief radiance to the town, so that when, at the child's guidance, they turned out of the main street into a narrow one, the shop windows of which were dim, and in some cases entirely unlighted, Scot hesitated, involuntarily and unthinkingly.

“Why d'you stop?” asked the child, wistfully, as he looked up in the dim light. “Are you frightened of anything, please?”

“Frightened!” laughed Scot, moving on with sudden confidence, as this speech reminded him that such streets as these were “home” to

many. "Why should I be frightened, my dear little fellow?"

"I don't know," mused the child, in the thoughtful, polite tone which seemed so strange from babyish lips; "but—but sometimes father and me think it dark here. We used to have gas in our shop, and that was very nice; but then it died. A gentleman came one day, and then father said it would die, 'cause he couldn't give some money. Father didn't hardly speak to me that evening—and, oh, the shop was dark; and people came in to ask why—not to buy; so father locked the door at last, and he hid his eyes on the table as if he was frightened; but I wasn't. A candle is nice, isn't it?"

"Another turning, is there?" inquired Scot, glad to say only that, as Willy led him into a street a little narrower, though hardly less gloomy, than the last.

"This is nearly our street." said the child, his voice stirred a little. "We're close to father now—quite close! Oh, father!"

The pitiful, childish cry broke off in a tearless sob, as if the weariness and the past despair, and the remembrance of the tale he had to tell,

were too much for the overwrought heart. Scot's hand closed more tightly on the little cold fingers ; but just then they turned another corner, and came suddenly upon a crowd, which blocked both the road and pavement. Scot stopped the child with his arm, and drew him closely to his side.

"Wait," he said ; "let me see what it is."

"Oh, come—please come !" entreated the child in an eager whisper, too thoroughly excited, now he was so near home, to bear this delay. "This is home ; the door is just here. Oh, will you please to come to father ? Will you please"—the babyish voice was raised now, addressing the crowd, which swayed and pushed and talked, and yet had a strange hush upon it now and then, as if it waited in a horror which was beyond words—"will you please let us pass ? We're going to father."

"If so—if it's his father, keep him back, in the name of Heaven's own pity !"

So a voice answered from the crowd, and quickly and compassionately Scot raised the little fellow in his arms, though the words were barely comprehended.

"We will push our way through, my child,"

he whispered, "but we must try the other side of the road."

"Oh, no, no!" shrieked the boy, with a frenzy which was literally startling after his gentle pleading. "Oh, please—father—father! It's father's door. Oh, tell them to let us go in—please tell them—please tell them! They'll go if you say it. Father—father! Father," whispered the child, his tone changing and falling in an instant, as, from Scot's arm, he stretched both hands to the dark little shop, "father, it's me!"

And then—while Scot gazed down in wonder at this sudden change—the wide eyes closed, the little white face fell heavily on his shoulder, and he knew that for a time there would be no knowledge of the things to be.

CHAPTER XVII.

OF all the manifold terrors which visited her at the Black Birches, the one which most severely tried Miss Michal's nerves, was a strong and boisterous wind.

"It's a wind," she used to say, with plaintive energy, "which nobody ever hears anywhere else. Where else does it come creeping so slyly up to the door, to hiss at the key-hole all about what it is going to do ; then break into a shriek to ask if I hear ; then roll back to gather all its strength, and, with a roar, come back to—batter in the house ?"

The conclusion of the remark, though more forcible than true, was the simple fact as it appeared in Miss Michal's imagination. All the horrors of burial among the fragments of a demolished building, did she suffer when—under cover of the darkness—the winds, in their so-called frolic,

seized the house and made it totter from end to end. And, if this were so on ordinary occasions, when Scot was there to speak lightly of her fears and tell her he liked to hear that revelry abroad—just as if it didn't mean instant destruction!—what it was on this night before Scot's return, can only be feebly imagined. Though the drawing-room trembled to its very foundation, and certainly could not stand against one more such shivering blast, she must still sit there in solitude; for the only alternative was to share the society of the soiled, slouching individual whom Miss Michal—though countless forcible adjectives rose in her mind perpetually in conjunction with him—never designated by any word beyond the very simplest applicable pronoun.

The darkness had set in; the wind was rising every moment—Miss Michal was sure of that,—and was raging at every corner of the house, tearing the bare branches out of its way, and altogether conducting itself like a whole army of infuriated giants who had at heart the fall of the Black Birches.

Miss Michal had left her easy-chair at the fire, and seated herself rigidly beside the

table, where the cold supper had no enticing look on this keen Winter night. But Miss Michal's thoughts were far away from the prospective meal—indeed, it was hard to tell how far they had gone, for, though she had a book of Family Devotions open on the table before her, and though she turned the pages at regular intervals, her eyes were not only closed, but hidden, too, behind an ample satin apron which she had taken off for that especial purpose.

So she had sat, as it seemed to her, through a whole cycle of the little timepiece which ticked so heavily in her solitude; while, in her lively imagination, the floor bent and swayed, and the roof came down to meet it; when, at last, through the noisy sweeping of the wind, she heard the peculiar, steady, easy knock which came from no hand but Scot's. Miss Michal replaced her apron in its usual position, and put away the book; for she could bear to look upon life in its less dark and devotional aspect, now that her solitude was over. By a violent plunge which she felt the whole house make, Miss Michal knew that Liath had been quick to open the front door; but, eager as she was to see Scot, she made no forward step to

meet him ; and, while she stood for a few moments, literally wondering what held her back, the tears—always the quickest interpreters in Miss Michal's case—answered her. In this storm, which beat upon the old house so pitilessly—and from cold and darkness to the home from which was taken now all homeliness—was he come back, disappointed and tired, and hopeless ?

Though Miss Michal could have set this doubt at rest in a moment by opening the drawing-room door and meeting Scot face to face, she did not do so. She stood with her fingers locked, and her eyelids beating like a bat's wings, until the door was opened without her intervention, and Scot came in, with a greeting which was only a little quieter than of old ; and—could Miss Michal believe her own eyes—yes, her own, though so dim and untrustworthy ? Was it really a boy—a living child—whom Scot held in his arms ?

“Scot,” she said, in a low, intense whisper, as she crept up to him, and rested her wondering eyes on his motionless burden, “what is it ?”

“A little lonely waif,” replied Scot, looking

down quite tenderly upon the closed eyelids with their thick wet fringe; "a little waif for us to care for, Aunt Michal."

"For us," gasped Miss Michal, faintly; "for us? Why?"

"I will tell you why presently," Scot said, as the child slowly awoke, with that terrible weariness which tells such a hopeless tale in a child's first waking moments. "Now it is nearly bed-time, isn't it?"

"Nearly bed-time!" echoed Miss Michal, aghast; "bed-time for such an infant! Why, Scot, it's midnight!"

"I daresay," said Scot, his tone striving in vain for its old brave ring, as he put the child down, yet kept one kind hand on the little shrinking form; "we shall be very glad to go to bed, but we are rather hungry, Aunt Michal."

If anyone had told Miss Michal what would occur under these mysterious circumstances, she would have meekly remarked, as a thing beyond argument, on its utter impossibility; but yet it *did* occur under her very eyes, and her astonishment was, after all, not the predominant feeling.

In a few minutes she was on her knees before the fire, unwinding the shabby comforter from

the frail little figure, drawing off the outer one of the tight, worn coats, and now and then touching the white, pinched cheeks experimentally with one finger, and—yes, and more than once—shyly (and with a rapid movement afterwards, to distract even her own attention from the deed) pressing upon them a small, warm kiss. And, though there broke no smile yet on the troubled, grave face, still the look of shrinking fear was fading slowly, as Scot—whom the child's eyes chiefly followed—moved about the room, making light of the journey, and chatting of a hundred pleasant childish trifles, though addressing Miss Michal all the time, and leaving the child to himself, to get accustomed to the new scene.

And now—Miss Michal again mistrusted those tearful eyes of hers, and softly moved her fingers over them, to be sure they were her own—in came Elizabeth with as fine a pheasant as was ever illicitly caught, and sauce and gravy and potatoes, and—“and all,” concluded Miss Michal, in her baffled thoughts, foundering for want of expression.

“Please, ma'am,” said Elizabeth, seeing the question on her mistress's face, “Liath got it

and managed it all. He said master'd be starved and hungry, and that it would be better."

Better! Could Miss Michal deny it, when she looked from the hot, savoury dish to her own previous cold arrangements?

"Aunt Michal," said Scot, pausing in astonishment a few minutes afterwards, as he sat coaxing the child to eat, "what is that mysterious noise? I have heard it at intervals ever since I came in."

"And I," rejoined Miss Michal, pausing to listen too, and to wonder whether the wind had really ceased ever since Scot had come in, or if it could really have been unnoticed by her, "I heard it too. It's some of the doors falling in with this fearful wind."

"Wind!" laughed Scot; and as he spoke he rose and rang the bell.

"It's the man banging on the door, sir," explained Elizabeth, timidly. "He's in the cellar—locked in. Liath likes to do it when he can, sir."

"I will set that right," said Scot; but still he tranquilly continued his meal, and there was even a smile on his harassed face.

"It is dreadful," observed Miss Michal, cheer-

fully. "Liath locks him up and worries him, and frightens me out of my wits! And then for Liath himself to go and—poach!"

When Willy had eaten all they could tempt him to eat, and was standing by Miss Michal to bid her good night, Scot went to undo Liath's work; and stayed away until, over the child's wide, sorrowful eyes, the lids had fallen in real and utter exhaustion.

"Scot," said Miss Michal, in a lively tone, when she looked up and met his watching gaze, as he re-entered the room, "I've just remembered the little bed. Wasn't it providential that I bought it?"

Scot nodded with a smile, before he carried the little fellow to his own room; but when he returned to Miss Michal she could see, more plainly than she had yet done, the evident anxiety with which he struggled.

"But, Scot," observed Miss Windish, half an hour afterwards, when Scot had finished the recital of his adventures in town (lingering over the pleasant side of his happening to fall in the way of this lonely child, and hurrying through the incidents over which he felt she would mourn or question him), "you are really not

going to keep this boy here as an extra drag upon you?"

"If he had had a home at all, I should not have brought him here, Aunt Michal," the young man answered, gravely. "As it is, don't you think we can give him one—at present?"

"Oh! as to what I *think*," moaned Miss Michal, "that's no matter at all. If you choose to gather here all the wretched objects in creation—and certainly the house is only fit for that—I cannot prevent it."

"Nor would you if you could," said Scot, too generous to resent the speech, even in his weariness to-night. "If I tried to turn that little fellow out to-morrow morning, you would not let me."

"At any rate you won't try," remarked Miss Michal, dolefully; but she poked the fire into a blaze as she spoke, and, to those who knew her, this action was in itself a wide response.

"What a terrible scene it must have been!" mused Scot, as he rested opposite her, his eyes upon the fire, and his voice low and troubled. "I dared not go in, for fear the child should wake to consciousness in there. The premises were nearly bare, though the—the bailiffs,"

said Scot, with a swift, angry glance at the door as he uttered this word in quick contempt, which sounded almost like amusement, "were in possession. In possession," he reiterated, his eyes kindling, "of the half-empty rooms, and the body of the suicide!"

"Oh, Scot, hush!" cried Miss Michal, all her little, pale features working. "How terribly you say it! What a wicked man he must have been!"

"A young fellow," Scot went on, in the rapid, dreamy tone which held so much straightforwardness even in its very perplexity; "a young fellow, they told me, whose wife had left him, and who had, two days before, parted with his child—up to that day his one constant companion—in (so they supposed) anticipation of this act. A young fellow—*young*? Great God! what can be the thoughts which lead a man to say his life has been long enough in its very beginning, and to end it for himself?"

"So wickedly," supplemented Miss Michal, with a shudder.

"So wickedly," echoed Scot, with great thoughtfulness. "His wife was a worthless woman to be grieved for; his child was but a

baby to be missed so sorely; his debts were mean and trifling ones to weigh a man down; and his life was a narrow, unnoticed, joyless life, hardly worth the living. To whom did it signify whether he lived it out in its dim course there, or hastened its close when he was tired of it?"

"Scot, Scot," cried Miss Michal, startled into an excitement of real alarm, "don't speak so of such a sinner! Oh! Scot, it is the deadliest sin of all, because no repentance can follow."

"No," the young man answered, very quietly. "Aunt Michal, what should we do, if our judgment did not lie in the hand of Him who made us, and who knows in what weak moments sometimes our great temptation finds us?"

"And you mean to say," observed Miss Michal, after a little pause, and a few irrepressible tears, "that the poor wretched man had been ruined by borrowing money?"

"That was only my own idea. Probably Mr. Albert Mostyn put it into my head; at any rate, both shop and house were, as I said, nearly empty, and the men had been sent in by the landlord. The house was almost in darkness when they arrived, and the young man was

sitting beside an empty grate—can you picture it? Five minutes afterwards all was over.”

“And could not those two horrible men have stopped him?”

“They don’t even seem to have seen it done. There was a glass of water on the table; and, before he questioned them by a word, they saw him drink; and——”

“And that was poison!” murmured Miss Michal, below her breath. “Oh, Scot, how sinful!”

“To-morrow, after nightfall—and in unconsecrated ground—they will bury him; and, Aunt Michal, I intend to go.”

“Oh! of course you do! I have long ceased to be surprised by anything you do,” bewailed Miss Michal, resignedly. “I suppose it would be useless to ask you what claim this miserable creature has upon *you*?”

“Quite useless, Aunt Michal; because all that I know about such a claim, *you* know equally well. But, if it were only for the child’s sake, I should go.”

A rigid and gloomy silence fell upon Miss Michal then, while she pondered her woes. As if it were not enough for Scot to be nearly

ruined himself, without going off to make himself one with—Miss Michal only used this term in thought, so she was not called upon to explain it—a man who has been utterly ruined, and who has ended his life by a crime! As if it were not hard enough for her to bear existence under present circumstances, even with Scot's constant presence and help, without his leaving her alone, and going off after strange deaths and funerals!

“Scot,” she said, when at last the burden of aggrieved thought found vent in speech, “you must do as you like, of course; but I don't think you have exhibited such wonderful sense, so far, in the management of your own affairs that it should tempt you to manage anyone else's. Just think how different it used to be in old times, when no worries ever came near you, and you didn't know the meaning of debt, and poverty, and misery, and——”

“This is a splendid wind, Aunt Michal,” put in Scot, rising, and throwing open one of the shivering windows; “strong and dry. I like to feel it—don't you?”

Miss Michal smiled with a feeble attempt at irony—but still she came and stood beside Scot at the open window.

"It would be curious," she said, "if I *did* like to feel the house tumbling down: It isn't many people—even women—who would *enjoy* being crushed to death, Scot; though of course it may be their doom, and they can't help it."

"Liath!" called Scot, as a footstep passed the open window, through which the wind rushed in and brought weird flying shadows, as it swayed the fire flame, and shook the globe on the lamp. "A fine wind, isn't it?"

"Indeed 'tis, sir; our barn 'll need extra props this year, I'll warrant."

"I thought you said you would go up stairs and watch with that little waif."

"So I was, sir," Liath answered, coming close to his master, because it was difficult to make himself heard; "and he woke and cried—for you, I guess, sir; but I told him lots o' things he should see to-morra, and got him to sleep agin at last—but not till he'd sung some hymn as it seems he allus sings, and couldna sleep athout. He's the darlinest baby, so fur as singing goes, as ever I see; but for solemnness, he might be a judge and jury all in one. When I asked him how he liked my bird for supper, he wanted to know all about wheer it used to

fly, and said he'd rather see it fly than eat it. It's plain he's not got his eatitite yet; though he swalla'd water all the time I let him, and yet his lips was as dry as a rock, poor little widgeon !”

“But why are you out now?”

“Only lookin’ round, sir,” replied Liath, with most demonstrative nonchalance. “I allus just like to look round—lately. I s’pose you know, sir, that that theer Frenchman’s comin’ back?”

“I didn’t know he was away.”

“Didn’t ye, sir? Oh, he went to Alps—that’s beyond London, ain’t it, sir?”

“Scot,” murmured Miss Michal, when Liath had received his information, and passed on into the darkness, “what can that ugly Frenchman mean by his conduct? You say he had that letter sent to tempt you to borrow the money. Scot, my dear, what can be his drift?”

“Only this,” Scot answered, as the wind tossed his hair from his hot face, “to bring me down so low in poverty—or something worse—that, as my last chance, I shall commission Bradford to buy (for the estate) the secret he pretends to hold of my uncle’s.”

"But suppose he really holds valuable information?" questioned Miss Michal, anxiously, while her longing thoughts hovered about their old easy life, and the possibility of Scot being enabled to resume it, only by the possession of these mysterious papers.

"Ah—suppose!" laughed Scot. "But, as Bradford says, when a man will sell only in the dark, it stands to reason that his goods will not bear the daylight—eh, Aunt Michal?"

"But, if you don't buy, there will be no end to his persecution."

"Sooner or later," returned Scot, tranquilly, "there must come an end."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was Monday evening, three days after Scot's return from London, and the reception-rooms at Osborne House were flooded with light, and dazzling in all the unveiled glory of green satin and gold-coloured gimp. Hothouse flowers, as costly as they were beautiful, stood about in bouquets, round in form and flat upon the surface ; and above them crept a faint, artificial scent which left no space for their pure, fragrant sighs.

Neither Bernard Levey nor his sisters would have liked to tell why this party was a source of unwonted excitement and ambition ; yet they all knew—for themselves and for each other—that it was so. Bernard, in the ugly orthodox costume, without which dancing is a luxury taboo'd, paused to look down the glittering rooms, and smiled with irrepressible satisfaction.

Though his acquaintance with Byron was on the slightest possible foundation, he agreed with him that "maidens, like moths, are caught by glare." Therefore, could Doris Egerton be surrounded by this splendour to-night, without feeling how delicious it would be to live always in its midst at Osborne House, with a husband who could afford her such luxuries, and who would take an actual pleasure in affording them for one whom he had selected to love? No, certainly not. Mr. Levey answered his own thought so, with a smile of amusement at there being any doubt about it.

Miss Levey, in a rose-coloured dress of manifold skirts and a very trifling appendage in the way of bodice, walked slowly into the supper-room, and tried to realise how the scene would strike anyone who came direct from the quiet, ordinary little meals at the Black Birches. And Violet, holding in one hand her long lace skirts, and in the other those minor allurements which, though belonging to the feminine body-guard, are unattached in the service, sailed down the stairs, and tried the polish of the hall floor, happily conscious that Captain Felix Gresford could appreciate a good waltzing surface as

highly as any officer in Her Majesty's service.

"Before this night is over," thought Bernard to himself, as the carriage of his first guests dashed up upon the gravel, and he gave one last complacent glance around him upon the "glare" which was to be so successful, "I shall have set all doubt at rest. Well, she is quite worthy of it all, and I shall be prouder of her than of anything I have."

"Before this night is over," mused Rose, succeeding at last in catching the seventh button of her long white glove, "I must let him see quite plainly what he was so slow to see on the morning before he went to London. That hint will have paved the way, and he will perhaps have thought much of it, and be grateful to me for any opportunity I may give him. I don't know how it is, but I feel that, with all that open, easy way of his, he has a great deal of very extraordinary and unnecessary reserve. But I think—I think"—with a smile at the mirrored reflection of a tall figure in rose-coloured silk—"it will all go smoothly and satisfactorily for me to-night."

"Before our ball is over," reflected Violet, her heart fluttering as she recognised the heavy

swift approach of the officers' drag from Minton, "poor Felix will, I expect, have spoken his mind at last."

A few minutes afterwards, the brother and sisters had separated, and were lost among their guests; and half the evening programme was over when it chanced that they met again a little beyond the crush in the great hall, which was devoted to the dancing.

"Bernard," whispered Miss Levey, in a tone of suppressed petulance, "did you really write that second note to Mr. Monkton, urging him to come, after he had said it was so very uncertain?"

"Certainly; and he wrote again to beg me still to consider it uncertain, though he would come if he could."

"You ought to have told me," fretted Rose. "I thought he was quite sure to be here after your second note. If I had known——"

"What?" asked Violet, with a smile—she could afford an excess of smiles to-night.

But Rose overlooked the query, and Bernard had walked on.

"It is strange, Rose—it is indeed," asserted Violet, with an evident consciousness of merit

in waiting to offer sympathy, "especially when you notice that Margaret Chamberlain is not here, though she promised to come."

"But she wrote an excuse."

"And what difference does that make?" laughed Violet, leaving her sister to fret over nothing that the words had really expressed, but much that they had implied.

On went the dancing, happily as these joys will always seem to go, until that impossible time shall come when our hearts' wrath, or grief, or bitterness will be painted in our faces, and reflected in our dress. Mr. Bernard Levey had more than once lapsed into forgetfulness of his duty as host, in the unusual energy with which he was completing, in his own person, the fascination which his surroundings were to exercise over Doris Egerton's mind. They had been dancing together, and now he had led her from the hall to a little room of his own, called by distinction the library, to show her a photograph of which he had been speaking, and to which—though of course Doris did not know this—he had carefully and adroitly led the conversation, in spite of many difficulties he had had to surmount in keeping Doris's way-

ward ideas in the groove he had marked.

"I have never been into this room before," said Doris, looking round it, as she stood in the light, which was a "glare" even here. "Is it your own private room, Mr. Levey?"

He was looking at her, while he framed his coming answer with that elaboration which in itself is so often fatal at such a time. Her eyes had not dropped from the rows of brightly-bound novels and the shining accoutrements of a Yeomanry officer, and so he could gaze unhindered. How different his room looked now! How pleasant it was to feel that it held only those two—the handsome master of the house, and that pretty girl with the bright eyes and the sunny hair, with the beautiful warm smile and tender lips, with the soft blush and the fair white skin! What figure in all the crowd had the grace of this girlish figure? Even her dress was the perfection of elegance, though its long white folds were simply of cashmere, among which the snowy silken trimmings caught the light richly and softly, with none of the metallic glitter of the beads and bullion he had left behind him in the hall.

"No, you have never been here before, Miss

Egerton," began Mr. Levey, venturing his prepared speech with a brave spirit; "if you had, the room would have been as sacred to me before this day, as I feel it to be now. But, if you are not here very often in the future, it will not indeed be for want of entreaty."

Her eyes were on his face now, resting there in simple surprise; not at what he said, but at the unusual nervous energy with which he said it.

"Though it is my own private room," he went on, bent upon going through the whole prepared rejoinder to her first remark, "it will never again charm me unless I may feel that you take an interest in it too, and will some day let it be yours equally with mine."

For an instant the floor swayed under Doris as if she were out at sea; but she speedily recovered herself.

"I have read a great many of these stories," she said, her pretty girlish voice unstirred by either pleasure or vanity; "I have read them aloud to Aunt Joan. I especially remember one or two. Shall we go back now?"

"Not yet—not quite yet," he pleaded, putting on a smile of such inscrutable purport that

a sensation terribly like laughter began to touch her lips. "Miss Egerton, before we return, let me speak one word to you here. I have long wanted to say it, and have delayed for—for fear, I suppose, of startling you. But now I can speak; no one will come in, and this has been such a cheerful, happy night. I am so proud to entertain you in my house. Of course I'm proud to entertain all my guests, but you especially—the prettiest and the brightest and the dearest."

"Will you let us go back now, Mr. Levey?" interposed Doris, quite gently, but in a tone which no man could have misunderstood, unless, like Bernard Levey, he had been blinded by ambition and self-love.

"Can you not understand me?" he whispered, smoothing his gloved fingers as he stood before her, and possibly for that moment fancying—for there must be fleeting rays of romance across even such a nature as his—what it would be if she met him with a smile and blush. "Miss Egerton, can you not understand for what word I am longing? Ever since I saw you first I have admired you beyond any lady I ever saw, and indeed almost

from that very day, I have loved you too."

"I thought, Mr. Levey," said Doris quietly—and as she spoke she stooped to take her skirt in her hand, that she might escape his eager gaze—"I thought you knew that I was engaged to Mr. Bradford. Your sisters knew, and I always felt sure you did too. I am sorry to see now that you did not."

"Once or twice," said Bernard, patches of red suddenly starting into life on the white and aquiline surface of his face, "I have heard remarks about yourself and—or rather, I should say, I have noticed that he, like myself, admires you very much."

"I am sure," put in Doris, with a flash of irrepressible merriment in her eyes, "that Kenneth Bradford does not admire me at all."

"I am not surprised," Mr. Levey allowed, gravely, "at any man's admiring you, Miss Egerton—indeed, I'll defy any man to help it—but in my case it is the weakest feeling. I love you a thousand times more than I admire you. No other man could love you as I do."

This is such a limping assumption at all times, that no wonder Doris received it then with calm and simple incredulity.

"I am very sorry," she said, "that you did not know I was going to marry Kenneth Bradford. We need not discuss the different ways in which men love, need we? Now I think papa will be wondering where I am."

"I thought you liked this house," observed Bernard, ruefully; "and it would be so near your father. You could see him every day; and I need not deny you anything. I love you so immensely that I should make you happy in every possible way. The whole aim of my life would be to make you happy; and no man could do more than that. And, if you are thinking about my sisters, Miss Egerton"—Mr. Levey had touched the height of passion, but instantaneously his foot had slipped, and down he had stumbled once more to his level—"they have large fortunes of their own—indeed they have—and are not at all dependent on my home."

"I am very glad to hear it, of course," said Doris, demurely. "It must be pleasant to have a large fortune."

"Accept mine, Miss Egerton!" cried Bernard, plodding once more up the height. "I shall never care for it again if you refuse it—never!"

"Did you think I was in want of a fortune,

then, Mr. Levey?" inquired Doris, with quiet humour.

"No ; but I know you will adorn a handsome home, and this is a handsome home ; and," he added, with a spasm, " I still hope you will adorn it."

"I have told you," said Doris, gently, " how impossible that is. Please let us go now."

But if the girl fancied that she had got rid of her admirer, by inducing him to take her from this private room of his, where he had so powerfully urged his suit, she was sorely mistaken. Just as persistently, and almost as hopefully, after she had professedly received her freedom, did the master of this dazzling mansion haunt his young guest, leading her attention with great anxiety to its various enticements, and supplementing his notices upon them with strong hints, or plain assertions, that these possessions could be hers, if she would only show a little natural discretion, and select for her husband the man whose power of bestowing was so great.

"Oh ! papa," whispered Doris, slipping her hand into Colonel Egerton's arm, when at last

she had escaped, and had found him alone, "let us go home."

"What! Tired already, love—you, the brightest and merriest of them all?"

"Yes, quite tired; are not you?"

"That's a different question," he laughed, shaking his head. "Old fogies soon tire of this rush of feet; but I thought you never tired of dancing."

"I do, papa; I am very tired now."

"Ah, I see!" returned Colonel Egerton, with a soft little whistle of comprehension. "I forgot who was not here. You would not ask me to take you home if Kenneth were here—eh, love?"

"I wonder," mused Doris, her gaze far before her, while she slowly smiled assent to her father's remark, "why Mr. Monkton is not here."

"Too busy, I daresay; he's always busy now."

"Papa," she said, raising her eyes as if in real surprise at his easy tone, "you don't feel as if something had happened to keep him away, do you?"

"Happened? No, dear, certainly not. Think

of trying to grow morbidly fanciful, on such a night as this !”

“Is it a fine night ?”

“I meant indoors, of course. Is not this a gorgeous scene ? Out of doors I really don't know. The wind is still too high for there to be any sign of rain. Why ? Are you afraid of your dress, between the door and the carriage ?”

“Not very,” replied Doris, with a laugh. “I was only wondering whether—— Papa,” she added, in a changed tone, “do you notice that Mr. and Miss Chamberlain are not here ?”

“Of course I notice ; but we need never be surprised where they are concerned, my dear,” said Colonel Egerton, moving slowly on with his daughter. “See, there is Levey looking for you.”

“Papa,” she whispered, clinging to him, “we are going home, aren't we ? Will you tell him so, if he comes for me ?”

“Oh !” exclaimed Colonel Egerton, again with the soft whistle of comprehension, “that is it, is it ? I thought his manner rather curious to-night in keeping you to himself, and frightening away other partners. Yet he knew of

your engagement, for I told him myself. All right, my dear little girl. Look up and smile. No sad looks for such as he !”

To express Mr. Levey's sentiments in Mr. Levey's own words, Doris Egerton had taken such a hold upon him that he could think of no one else. Even after her plain avowal of her engagement to Kenneth Bradford, he could not stand aside and leave her to win what enjoyment she could from this festival which he had ordained. He had apparently a still firmly rooted conviction that, if she were made fully aware of the numerous attractions of Osborne House, she could no longer resist him, or be sufficiently blinded to her own interests to prefer young Bradford, before the immaculate scion of the wealthy house of Levey.

But after his shrewd guess, Colonel Egerton did not seem to think it necessary that he should leave his daughter again, and just as soon as it could be courteously arranged, his carriage was sent for and announced. With a sigh of relief—in spite of a certain uncomfortable feeling that her refusal of Bernard Levey had not been taken as decisive, and that he had every appearance of being prepared to state his

feelings once more at the earliest opportunity—Doris took her seat in the brougham, and in her natural, unaffected way answered Mr. Levey's eager last words, while he stood at the carriage door, braving the tempestuous wind, the ardour of his breast being a more efficient armour than its embroidered decoration. Then Colonel Egerton—with a laughing remark to his host, which, though incomprehensible in its full meaning by the recipient, still gave the old officer a little satisfaction in the utterance—followed Doris, and drew up the window.

Not for long after their departure did the dancing continue at Osborne House; but (before that cry of alarm and terror stopped it as by a breath) Violet Levey and Captain Gresford had managed to exchange a few words which gave mutual satisfaction.

“A capital ball—don't you think so, Miss Levey?”

Not a very intricate question, and Violet's answer was equally forcible in its simplicity.

“Very. I'm so glad you have enjoyed it. I hope you will come again soon.”

“Miss Violet,” replied Captain Gresford, impressively, “I will come to-morrow, if you will allow me.”

"But we shall not give another ball to-morrow," observed Violet, with a frank and charming smile. "No one will be here."

"Everyone will be here whom I wish to see. May I come?"

"Oh! of course we shall be delighted to see you," whispered Violet, with an innocent and charming skill in the use of the plural pronoun. "I shall quite look forward to your visit, even if Bernard and Rose do not. Everything is so dreadfully dull on the day after a ball—don't you think so?"

"To-morrow will not be dull. If it is not to be the happiest day of my life, it will be the most awfully miserable."

"How strange!" murmured Violet, sweetly, as she glided to her place in the dance, still of course at Captain Gresford's side. "I cannot imagine it possible."

"Violet," whispered her sister, when that dance was over, "what can have kept away the Chamberlains and Mr. Monkton?"

"They are having a small dance together, perhaps, on their own account," answered Violet, flippantly. "What do you think, Rose?"

The sisters were together, and Rose had

taken care to speak where no one could overhear.

"I do not know."

"Well, don't look so crestfallen, for you ought to rejoice in your sister's happiness. I'm going to accept Felix Gresford to-morrow—I declare, Rose, I never saw such a tragic countenance. What have you on your conscience?"

"What's that?"

"The wind. What else? I have heard it now and then all the evening. Don't be so silly, Rose. Where are you hurrying now?"

"Upstairs. I want a little rest, though I don't know what disturbs me. I long to feel the wind upon my face, and to look out into the darkness. Oh! how this glare has made my head *âche*."

"Or something else," mused Violet, smiling with a peculiar kind of sympathy—which at any rate had the merit of not being demonstrative—as her elder sister, in her gorgeous dress, passed silently from the gay scene.

* * * * *

Colonel Egerton's carriage had just turned into the road which skirted the sloping meadows lying between Comely Place and the

river—beyond which lay the Black Birches—when unexpectedly, and for no apparent reason, the horses were pulled up.

“What is it?” inquired Colonel Egerton; but he had wondered for a few moments before putting down the window, and so, by the time the question was asked, his coachman had whipped on his horses. “What was it, Evans?” called the Colonel, a little louder.

“I saw some one riding up the larch meadow, sir,” said Evans, tightening the reins again, to turn and answer his master; “I thought it would be Mr. Monkton, and that he would wish to speak to you.”

“And it was not, of course?”

“I’m not sure, sir, but I think no one else could ride up the meadow, from the Green Pits to the road behind us. Still it could hardly have been Mr. Monkton, because he crossed into the bridle path to Comely Place and rode on fast.”

“*Up* the meadow!” repeated Colonel Egerton, incredulously. “Nonsense, man; do you think anyone would cross that wooden bridge on horseback? It’s only a plank. Drive on, and don’t fall asleep again.”

"Evans has partaken rather freely of something at Osborne House, I expect," he muttered, with a laugh, as he leaned back in his seat; "he dreams dreams and sees visions."

But, as Doris asked no questions, he fancied she had heard nothing of these dreams and visions.

"You look so tired, my dear," he said, when they had left the carriage, and entered the lighted hall at home, "that I recommend your going straight to your room. I will send you something which will do you good, and Mary is sure to have a famous fire there for you. Good night, my darling. Be sure," he added, kissing her with infinite tenderness, "that you bring the usual roses down with you in the morning, and not"—with a soft touch upon her cheeks—"these unfamiliar snow-blossoms. Good night, dear love."

He stood to watch her as she walked slowly up the stairs; and stood so, even after she had looked back with a smile, and turned out of sight. In deep thought he stood, until—one minute afterwards—the silence of the house was broken by a cry of fear and horror from his darling's lips.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHILE the guests had been assembling at Osborne House, Miss Windish sat before her parlour fire, engaged in a task which was so new and unfamiliar to her, that she caught herself—or rather she might have caught herself had she not been too intently engrossed in the task for a thought beyond it—smiling in serene astonishment even at herself. Aided by a great many small gesticulations—soaring sublimely above all passion, though intended to illustrate, in their turn, alarm, ferocity, and slaughter—she was narrating the personal experience of Jack the Giant Killer, in the novel form of an autobiography; and, if the little listener, who stood before her, with wide eyes, which in all their wonder retained that unchildlike gravity which told of a life robbed of its babyhood, could not be sufficiently impressed with the giant's

savagery to content Miss Michal, still a balance was struck by his evident realisation of the feebleness and helplessness of Jack himself.

“That’s all.”

Miss Michal’s favourite verbal conclusion fell here upon an awed, expectant silence.

“Is it?” questioned the child, wistfully. “Weren’t you frightened when you’d killed the giant?”

“Not a bit,” asserted Miss Michal, delighted to see how this identification of herself with her hero proved the success of her autobiographical experiment.

“Is the giant in heaven now?”

Miss Michal’s reply this time was not so brisk. Indeed, when it came, it was not clothed in words at all, but only fell in kisses on the questioning lips.

“And now,” she said, presently, rising at the sound of Scot’s step without, “suppose we make the tea, and begin to think about bed. It’s all very well for us to talk about not being sleepy, and all that sort of thing; but while we are so tiny——”

Miss Michal ceased her harangue suddenly for want of an audience, and stood watching the

open door, with the tea-caddy in one hand and the ladle in the other. And when Scot, with the child on his shoulder, came stooping under the doorway, she had the hardest work in the world to prevent answering his laugh, and to gather a suitable expression of woe into her face.

“Well, Scot, then you aren’t going to the dance at Osborne House?”

“Not unless you want a partner, Aunt Michal. Are *you* going?”

“Absurd!” she muttered, closing the tea-caddy with a little bang of disapproval. “For goodness’ sake put that boy down, Scot, and rest yourself. You look as harassed, at this moment, as if you’d the national debt on your mind.”

“This little grave old gentleman is getting to look better already, isn’t he, Aunt Michal?” questioned the young man, as he put the child to the ground, and stroked his pinched cheeks with such a tender, gentle touch of his tired fingers, that Miss Michal turned away and formed a wonderful, though weak, resolution not to worry herself about his troubles any more, since he could defy them so openly.

When tea was over, the child dragged his chair from the table, and set it on the hearthrug near Scot's ; then, seating himself, he waited with his little hands folded, and his feet crossed. Miss Michal, on her way out of the room to visit a hen which was in hospital in the kitchen, noticed, too, that the slow, unchildlike tears were gathering in the boy's wistful eyes.

"Sure as ever the evening comes," she mused to herself, on her way, "he goes through that silent fretting for his father. Of course such a wicked man ought not to be fretted for at all by a sensible child ; but still he does it, and it's very dismal. One cannot very well try to teach him now that this father of his was a bad man ; and yet how much pleasanter it would be if he knew !"

With this extraordinary opinion depressing her, Miss Michal administered a dose to her patient, and stood to discuss minutely with Liath the prospects of a new-born yellow brood, which was another of her especial cares at this moment. And so a long half-hour passed before she returned to the sitting-room, to find Scot writing, while the child now stood close at his side, pleading, in a timid whisper,

for him to "play." Miss Michal was perfectly aware that this request had reference to no romping or game of any kind, so she herself put Scot's cornet-box beside him, before she took up her sewing—such sewing for the unpractised fingers!—and let her needle creak its way through a stiff little snow-white shirt, as if through cardboard.

"A business letter, I suppose, Scot?" she queried, when at last his pen halted, and, with its feathered end, he ruffled the little head beside him. "Dear, dear! how glad you seem that it is over!"

"Not sorry, Aunt Michal, by any means," said Scot, whistling while he folded and sealed the letter to his old lawyer. "I think Bradford could not have received that letter I left at his office, or he would have sent to me. At any rate, this shall go to him."

"I have wondered each day that you didn't telegraph to him," sighed Miss Michal. "The Bradfords couldn't have known that *he* was living here all this time."

"I have told the fact plainly enough now," said Scot, perfectly comprehending that Miss Michal's contemptuous pronoun belonged to

the bailiff. And then he rose and put aside the letter—where it was to lie untouched until its tidings were nothing worth,—and gave the little lad a “play,” which was as new to him as it was exciting, and left him in a state of utter breathlessness, but of intense yet puzzled delight.

“It sounds funny to laugh so loud,” he said, looking straight from Scot’s face to Miss Michal’s. “I oughtn’t to—ought I?”

“Certainly not,” retorted Miss Michal—perhaps finding it the easiest thing to say, under the circumstances.

“I thought not,” meditated the little fellow, only half aloud. “But I couldn’t help it. It came.”

“I have before now known a little boy who laughed aloud occasionally,” remarked Scot; but Miss Michal did not again raise her eyes from her work, until Willy had won his request, and Scot was playing to a most rapt and earnest little listener.

“Now, my dear, say ‘Good night,’” put in Miss Michal, when Scot paused, after playing the airs he felt the child might recognise, and possibly be fond of; “it is hours beyond the

proper bed-time for such a small person."

With prompt obedience, the boy did as he was told; but, when he and Miss Michal reached the door, he stopped her suddenly, with an eager clasp of his arms about her neck.

"Oh! stay—oh! let me stay!" he pleaded, with a quick, convulsive sob. "I—am frightened."

"It's after eleven now," fretted Miss Windish, looking back helplessly.

"Never mind, Aunt Michal," said Scot, speaking coolly in French, as he changed a shank of his cornet. "The tunes, perhaps, have reminded him of old times, and this hour, too, brings it back to him. Let him stay, poor little boy!—won't you? And if we take no notice of the fear—which is quite a natural one, after all,—it will soon die away."

It was not for the child Scot played now—neither for the child nor for herself, as Miss Michal knew; he was playing to his own thoughts, with long pauses between the melodies—pauses which she felt it her duty to break as often as she could.

"Scot," she said, interrupting him with a jerk in the last line of "Adelaïde," "I wonder

you never play those old airs I used to sing to you at Kingswood. There was 'Meet me by moonlight alone,' and 'Le Reveil d'un Beau Jour,' and 'The Woodpecker,' and—all. They never had the dismal sound of the things you sometimes play. I am sure those you lay to Schubert make me more miserable than debts do, because I like them too much to stop them, and yet I don't like them at all. That last tune was so beautiful, and yet——"

"Somehow," said Scot, reflectively, as he put away his cornet, "I never can bring out those upper notes full and clear, in B flat; with my A shank on, I could manage it pretty well."

And Miss Michal accepted the reply as meaning only what it seemed to mean; though she was vaguely conscious that his cornet was more to him than she could understand, and that he dared not let its voice lead him often back to those days at Kingswood, when no shadow of debt, or poverty, or dishonour had darkened that straight, clear path which stretched before him through a useful and a noble manhood.

"Now that we are silent again," remarked

Miss Windish, presently, "I can hear that the wind is as high as ever. We are going to have another night of it."

"It does no harm, Aunt Michal," said Scot, lightly; and just at that moment Liath brought him in a note. It was not wonderful that Miss Michal's eyes grew so round and eager, nor that her work fell in her lap, as she gazed from the note in Scot's hand to the dial of the time-piece.

"Twelve o'clock, Scot. Don't you be led to go to Comely Place at this hour, whatever Margaret says."

But, in spite of her anger—for Miss Michal was too really wrathful to plead—she knew that when Scot left the room, going without a word of good-bye, for fear of the child's tears, he was on his way out into the tempestuous midnight darkness.

She sat quite still for a long time after he had left her, her mind torn between two desires—that of pleasing the child by keeping him with her, and that of doing what she knew to be her duty, and insisting on his going to bed.

Of course it was very hard to resist his entreaty to stay, and of course he might rest all

day to-morrow to make up for this ; but still it was just as hard to sit and watch him in that unnatural wakefulness, shadows growing under his eyes, and a fevered spot beginning to burn in each thin cheek. So, for the sake of escaping both these alternatives, Miss Windish went away, to wander about the house for a time, and, as she expressed it, see that things were right.

Though perhaps her strongest bias was towards her invalid hen, she found a visit to it impossible, as the kitchen door was locked. Never doubting that the man in possession had taken the key with him to his own room, poor Miss Michal, feeling the indignity sorely, retired into the dark and unused drawing-room to "have her cry out." She never knew—because, after that one glance at the time-piece, while Scot was reading Margaret Chamberlain's note, she never thought of the time again through all that night—how long she had been away, when she returned to the warm and lighted sitting-room, to find it empty.

Just as plainly as if she had been told—so Miss Michal said afterwards—she knew that the child was gone to look for Scot, and, acting on

her first impulse, she stood in the hall and called Liath, in a voice pitched for the purpose of reaching his ear in his attic.

But, to her surprise, Liath emerged only from the kitchen, taking the key from the lock as he came, and locking the door behind him on the outside.

"Then you are not in bed, Liath?" exclaimed Miss Michal, perhaps rather unnecessarily. "Where's the child?"

Considering that Liath had said good night to Willy four hours before, and had fancied the child in bed ever since, his reply did not materially further the discovery.

"He couldna have bin in the kitchin, Miss," continued the old man, meditatively, "cos the door's bin locked all evenin'—it's a satisfaction to lock 'im anywheers, even if I'm 'bliged to lock myself with 'im—and 'Lizbeth's bin gone to bed this hour. He mun be out, miss; theer's no doubt o' that; and what a night for sich a delcut little un! If——"

"If what?" interrogated Miss Michal, sharply.

"Nothin', Miss Windy. I was on'y goin' to say that theer Frenchmun would be at the bot-tom o' this, on'y he's away."

"Nonsense," retorted Miss Michal, with stern common-sense. "Get your lantern, Liath."

"I think not, Miss," said Liath, pulling down the brim of his old felt hat, and opening the front door against the wind. "I'll do better athout, and safer for the little un. Bolt up behind me, please, Miss Windy, and don't ye mind that theer bangin'. It'll do him good to exercis his wrisses a bit on the door panniers."

"Make haste, Liath. How slow you are!" fumed Miss Michal, astonished even herself at the anxiety she felt. "Of course I shall search the house while you are away, but all the same I'm sure the child has wandered out after Mr. Monkton. Oh, dear—dear!"

But, before this pathetic conclusion, Liath passed from her sight, out into the heavy darkness:

From room to room the little lady wandered, her candle flaring among the draughts, and her feeble call now and then breaking the silence of the empty rooms. But her fruitless search did not surprise her in the slightest, and her tears had fallen all the time as quickly as they fell when it was over. At last she stood to rest a minute by the fire. Even the reiterated decision that "of course the boy was safe with

Scot by now," failed to console her in the least, because her thoughts argued unconsciously against her words.

"Mistress!—oh, mistress!"

The cry came from the top of the house, yet it reached Miss Windish, clear and shrill.

"What is it, Elizabeth?"

This answer was a muffled whisper on the dark staircase, as Miss Michal groped her way up; oblivious of her candle, oblivious of the indignity of running at her servant's call, conscious only of an overwhelming fear.

"This way, mistress—up here, and to the back, please."

It was easier now to grope her way, for there shone a strange, wide light from the open door of the servant's bed-room. Miss Michal went swiftly up the last few stairs, and, with her thoughts upon the missing child, entered the lighted room, with anxious, searching eyes, which finally settled upon the red panes of the lattice window.

One minute afterwards, the silence of the old house was shattered by a shriek of terror, and the bailiff started from his chair upon the kitchen hearth, and let his pipe fall in atoms on the stone.

Before he had reached the door, Miss Michal—her eyes dry and clear, as if they had not ever known the touch of tears—had turned the key outside, and had thrown the door open.

“If you are a man,” she said, looking straight into his face, with an appalling doubt, “go out and help to save us from ruin and death. See, this is the quickest way, through the back door. I will draw the bolts. Oh! have pity on us! You are strong, and can do much. I’m very sorry I’ve never spoken to you before—I was so angry. You won’t remember it against me—you’ll help them in this awful time, won’t you? And you’ll keep the master from rushing to his death, as he always does? See how the wind brings the flame towards us, and—and how are one or two human hands to stay it?”

Some answer the man made, which was entirely unintelligible to Miss Michal; but she thanked him for it with a humility which was most touching, and repeated her thanks absently, even when she was left alone in the doorway—bathed in the lurid light of that flame which swept from the Green Pits across the Winter sky.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





